

THRILLING MYSTERY NOVEL

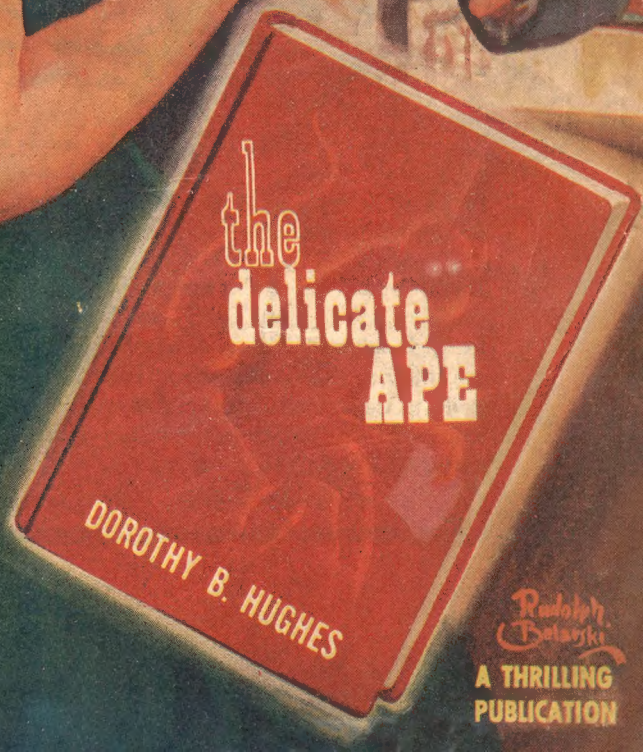
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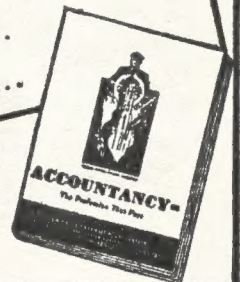
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THRILLING MYSTERY NOVEL MAGAZINE

VOL. XXII, No. 2

WINTER ISSUE

Price 15c



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Where Readers and the Editor Meet

Next Issue's Featured Mystery Novel: THE EVIL STAR, by JOHN SPAIN

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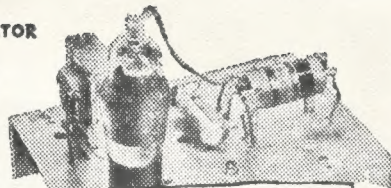
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The LINE-UP

A DEPARTMENT WHERE READERS
AND THE EDITOR MEET



THE girl with the blue-black hair was beautiful. Just an hour ago she had been rushed to the Emergency Receiving Hospital adjoining police headquarters. She had suffered a concussion and severe bruises, and was evidently a hit-and-run victim.

Lieutenant Steve McCord of the Los Angeles Homicide Bureau stared hard at the girl and snapped a swift question.

"Who hit you?"

Terror flared in her blue eyes, stiffened her lips. Then her face went blank.

"I don't know," she whispered. "I can't remember."

Continued questioning proved fruitless. McCord shrugged, nodded to Dutch Hammerschlag beside him. Both men stepped outside.

"The lady is faking," murmured McCord with a puzzled frown. "Not only that, she's scared to death. There's nothing wrong with her memory. The trouble is, she remembers too much. Don't leave her alone."

The Vanishing Lady

McCord returned to his office where routine matters occupied his attention for thirty minutes. Yet, all the while thoughts of that strange terrified girl kept nagging at him with an odd persistence.

Suddenly the telephone on his desk rang. The explosive voice of Inspector Regan announced angrily that the girl in Emergency had vanished. Threatening to break McCord unless the girl was found, Regan hung up. An immediate alarm was sent out over the radio as the entire police force moved to intercept her.

McCord stepped to the locker to get his hat and topcoat, then turned as the door opened suddenly. A cool, chilling wind seemed to blow against him.

The girl he was looking for, the girl a thousand cops were seeking, was standing there in his doorway!

"Pardon me," she said in a perfectly composed voice. "I'm looking for the Missing Persons Bureau."

For a moment McCord thought he was dealing with a lunatic. But before many hours had passed he knew she was implicated in a ruthless chain of killings that plunged him into the most baffling case of his career—

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THE EVIL STAR By JOHN SPAIN

McCord grabbed the girl and demanded to know why she had run out of the hospital. Fear darkened her eyes and she tried to flee. McCord tripped her. She struggled in his arms and insisted the police were crazy. When she bit his wrist he banished her to a detention cell.

Cancelling the order for the city-wide police search, McCord settled back to routine matters. Ten minutes later a soft voice interrupted him:

"Pardon me. Can you direct me to the Missing Persons Bureau?"

McCord looked up from his desk and shuddered violently. It wasn't possible, he told himself. But there she was.

The same girl!

Faith, Hope and Charity

Only after a careful study of her did he tumble to the fact that she was dressed differently from the other girl, who was obviously her sister.

For the next hour Police Headquarters was a madhouse. When order was finally established McCord learned that there were *three* sisters, not two, and that they were identical triplets. The girls were Faith, Hope and Charity Martin. But the police were far from being in the clear because Hope, the girl who had originally escaped from Emergency was still missing. It was her sisters, Faith and Charity, who had appeared at Headquarters seeking her.

The frantic search for Hope Martin was resumed without success. Then came a break. The manager of the Hotel Metropole phoned in with the information that the photo which had been given to the newspapers resembled Hope Delancey, one of the hotel's guests.

Dutch Hammerschlag was sent out to bring Hope Delancey in. But all Dutch got for his

(Concluded on page 8)



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THE LINE-UP

(Concluded from page 6)

trouble were three .38 slugs in his body. By the time McCord reached the hotel Hammerschlag was just a huddle of baggy blue serge lying in a pool of blood. And if there was ever any doubt about the identity of Hope Delancey, it was banished by the eight-by-ten theatrical pose of bubble-dancing Hope Martin, which stood on the dresser in that drab hotel room.

Violence and Murder

With Hammerschlag's death to drive him on, Steven McCord dropped everything else to devote himself to the perilous hunt after the murderer. But the deeper he delved into the case the more complicated it became.

Meanwhile, wherever the Martin sisters went violence and murder followed. In the midst of questioning Charity about Hammerschlag's death someone slugged McCord into oblivion and kidnaped Charity.

Later, Faith, secretary to a rich and eccentric old woman, was charged with murder when her employer was found strangled and robbed of valuable jewels, among them the fabulous "Evil Star" sapphire.

Finally, there was the night when McCord drove Charity home. They were climbing the steps to her apartment when McCord sensed rather than heard the approach of a car. He turned, saw a car rolling smoothly and without lights toward them. A blurred face appeared at a rolled-down window. Then powder flashes brightened that leering face and, hot lead began to scream around them.

Suspense Galore

THE EVIL STAR will keep you in a continuous fever of suspense and excitement as it races through one smashing, action-packed scene after another to a climactic finish. Author John Spain doesn't pull any punches in this hard-boiled classic. As for Lt. Steve McCord, take our warning. His breathless adventures will compel you to read this whodunit at one sitting.

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—THE EDITOR.

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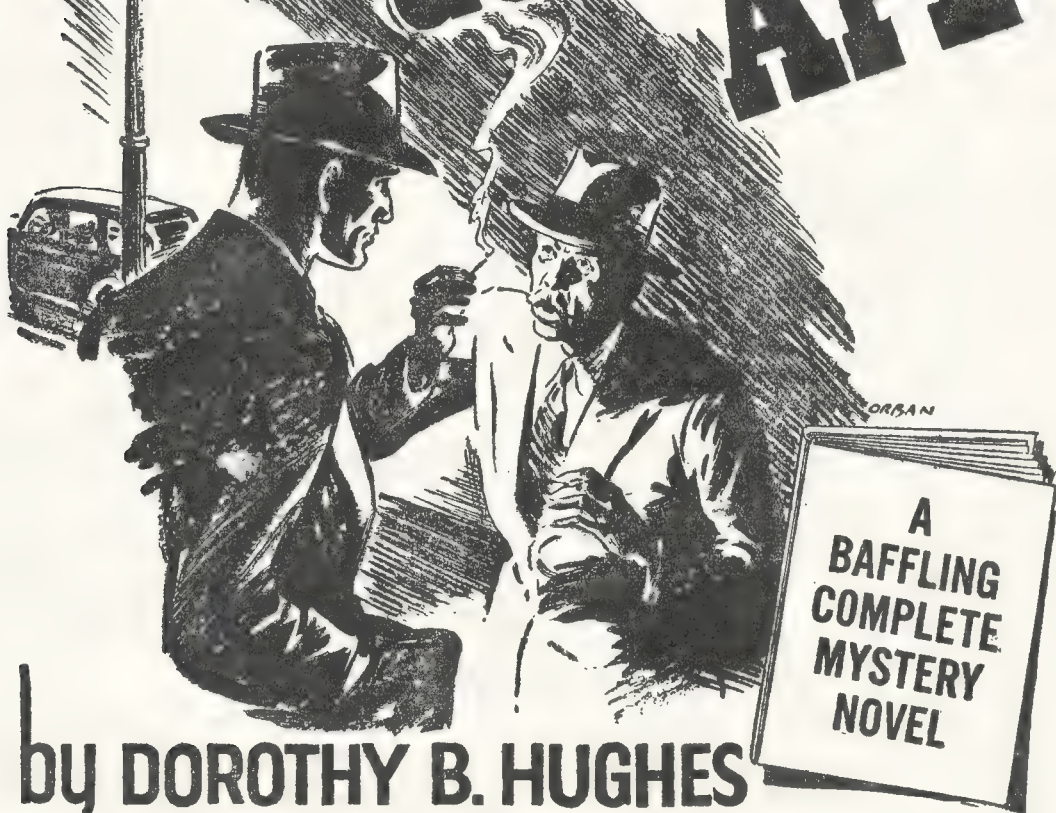


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the delicate APE



by DOROTHY B. HUGHES

Piers Hunt, Undercover Agent, Fights a Lone Battle Against the Vengeance of Those Who Would Destroy Humanity!

I

THE man came out of the front doors of the great and gray Pennsylvania Station into the early night. The street was curiously empty, deserted. It was as if all living, moving things had known he was emerging at this hour and this place and had, in instinct rather than knowledge, scuttled into hiding.

The lighted lamps at the moment seemed to throw no black geometrics to the pavement. Rather there was spread a strange twilight look, not light, not dark, an unhealthy pallor. Far overhead the sky was clear. If you looked long enough and hard enough you could distinguish the fragments of stars.

The man started across the wide deserted street to the opposite pavement. His heels counted his steps with fearsome clarity. In the silence, intensified by the

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The Assassination of Secretary Anstruther Is

muted hum of uptown New York, they had the sound of doom.

They were too even, too studied; he should break the rhythm, perhaps run the last of the way. He did not run. He was afraid to run, a fear perhaps if once he started he would not be able to stop.

He stood for a moment listening, not moving. The night touched a chill finger to the back of his neck and the touch snaked down his spine into his entrails. It wasn't a cold night but Washington had been humid, unreasonably so for May; the club car had been, despite conditioning, airless. The contrast was too sudden for his blood to warm before he shivered. He thrust his hands into his pockets and started towards Broadway.

There was no taxi in sight; he hadn't expected there would be. The walk would be good for him. He needed air in his lungs. The blocks to the hotel, where he had registered four days earlier, were short, too short for a man who normally covered miles in a day. He had spent hours sitting in offices and trains this day; he was tired of the indoors and inaction.

He bit on the truth. He was afraid to take a cab. Cab drivers were open to bribery. Even if he were delivered safely, there could afterwards be a whispered conference on the corner, an exchange of address for a dirty green bill. He would walk. One of the occupants of the club car conceivably might have known that the man in the dark blue suit and brown shoes and soft brown hat, the youngish man without distinguishing marks, was Piers Hunt.

Conceivably in one or another of the government offices where he, as Mr. Thompson—Smith, Brown, Jones were too obvious—had wasted the day, someone might have divined his true identity. How, he didn't know. He hadn't a half dozen speaking acquaintances in this part of the world. He had seen none of them since he arrived. Piers Hunt was not known to be in the United States; he had no reason to be here. The job on this side of the water was Gordon's. Even Gordon didn't have information that Piers had come over. But Piers knew that there were times when inaccessible knowledge filtered through in almost fanciful fashion. This might be one of them.

He turned left, started up the cavernous empty path of mid Broadway. The lights here, not many blocks from the sunburst of Times Square, were sparse, and the overhanging heights of buildings laid heavier shadow than was pleasant.

There was a loneliness more pregnant of danger than sight or smell of the enemy. It was a loneliness he had known in jungle deeps

and in forest, moments when it seemed as if God had withdrawn His hand. There was no reason for the feeling to enter into him here but it quickened his senses and he divined rather than heard the footsteps behind him.

They were not close, not as yet, and they were not loud. They might have been imaginary, but when he broke the rhythm of his stride, diminishing it, he heard them, distinct. He walked a few paces then again broke rhythm and again he heard them falter in their attempt to synchronize into invisibility. He knew then, knew this was no casual walker on the streets of New York.

He controlled the impulse to break and run. The kaleidoscope of lights was visible ahead but he was only at 36th street. He might, it was true, be able to outrun his pursuer but he couldn't hope to outdistance a bullet. That he had not been killed before he became conscious of the follower became a latent reassurance. This man, whoever he was, wasn't hired to kill, only to smell out the burrow where the fox was holed. With the realization came quick hard anger, and, on its heels, decision.

They didn't know the hotel where he was registered. They weren't to learn this easily. Having discarded the first method of escape, a sprint, he also discarded the next obvious, a devious route. Had there been other men abroad on this lonely stretch, he would have faded into the shawl of a facade, waited to surprise his shadow. But all humans, save himself and the man in the dark behind him, were still hiding where they had fled at the silent crackling of danger. He turned, stood planted, hands shoved deep into the pockets of his dark sack coat. He stood, a target, and waited.

The man behind him, had his nerves been strong, could have turned on his heel and slunk away. Instead he moved, hesitant, his steps lagging as he cowered forward the more than half-block to where Piers waited. He came almost abreast and Piers did not give way. He stopped then. He was a small man, a head and half smaller than Piers.

His coat was bunched, his new dove-gray hat sat stiffly on his head. There was a small green feather stuck in the bow. His face was a yellowish square; he wore a bedraggled yellow mustache over bad teeth, and his pale eyes were shifty under ragged yellow eyebrows. There was a greenish tinge to his brown suit.

Piers didn't see this detail on the dark street. The man had been across the aisle, near to the door, in the club car up from Washington. A man rolling a thin cigarette,

the Harbinger of Disaster and Chaos!

rubbing at a spot on his black shoes, scraping his thumb nail on his chin—a man with nervous fingers. The eyes scuttled now from Piers. He dived right. Piers shifted inexorably. A scribble of terror went over the yellow face.

Piers spoke softly, so softly. "Have you a match?"

The tongue darted out again; the glands of the man's thin neck swelled.

"A match," Piers repeated.

The man started to tremble, it began with his hat and ran through him like water. The nervous fingers fumbled in his pockets. His eyes kept leaping to Piers' jacket pocket; jammed stiffly forward by his fingers.

Piers laughed so softly. His voice blurred. "Or have you the time, perhaps?"

TERROR jabbed into the man. His fingers, shaking like wind, held a small packet of unwanted matches.

They crossed to where the Metropolitan Opera House stood, dark, deserted after the season. In this abandoned block the man, if he were a man, would turn and strike. He wasn't.

Knowing this, yet because of the possibility of attack, Piers spoke again. "What is your name?"

The breathing thickened.

Piers repeated, "Your name. What is your name?"

The voice came at last. It was thin, reedy. "Where are you taking me? What do you want with me?"

Piers laughed. It wasn't meant to reassure. He said, "I told you. I believe it is safer we walk the rest of the way together. And what is your name?"

"What do you want with me?" the man stammered shrilly.

"You were on the train from Washington," Piers said. "I noticed you. Did you know that I noticed you, Mr. . . . ?"



Some of the characters in this novel—left to right: Hugo von Eynar, Morgen von Brecklein, Piers Hunt, Gordon, and General von Brecklein

"You have a match," Piers noted gently. "Strike one."

The craven obeyed. His tongue kept touching the corners of his mouth. The trembling light flared.

"Hold it higher," Piers suggested.

It illumined the yellow face, the perspiration wetting the brow and the scraggling yellow mustache, the moisture in the nostrils, the frantic eyes.

Piers blew his breath and they were again in darkness. "I wanted to see your face." He said it pleasantly but still too softly. He waited but the man did not, could not speak. "Shall we walk together now?" He swung beside the man and his arm jarred the shaking elbow. "I take it you are going my way?"

The man stumbled forward, pressed on by Piers' dominant arm. His breathing was like a sob. Obviously he believed that Piers held a gun. Obviously he himself did not carry one, or, if he did, dared not reach for it.

The man said eagerly, as if it were a lesson well learned, "I am a commercial traveler. Between New York and Washington. I live in New York."

Piers interrupted. "In this country you are called a traveling salesman. His voice laughed. "You should have been told that, too. Perhaps we can have a drink together. There are some questions I should like to put to you. Your name. Your—"

They had come upon 42nd street. Across it flared the white and red and green and blue lights of a bright Broadway. Once it had been blacked out. That was a long time ago, twelve and more years ago. Returning to it after twelve years, Piers could not look upon the whiteness without a welling in his blood, a determination in his heart. The lights of the world, the lights of Broadway, must not be put out again.

Still jabbing the hireling's elbow, he moved him across the street to the west side where the brightest lights overhung the

pavement below. The walk was dense with man, the customary, evening, before theater crowd, milling and swelling and shuffling north and south. Beyond the curb the motor traffic was as dense, and more strident.

Piers bent to the ear of his captive. "Why won't you tell me your name? I can find out, you know."

They were in front of the Paramount where the crowd was most thick, the noise most shrill, pierced only by the atonal chant of the theater's uniformed barker . . . seats inside . . . seats inside . . .

Without warning the man ducked and cut away. Piers, turning quickly, saw his bunched coat pushing frantically through the mass, battering against its imperturbability.

The man plunged out of sight and Piers shouted, "Wait—" He himself battered through the crowd, making his way to the curb where he could both see ahead and move more quickly. The man had done the same. Yet he might have lost himself amidst the dark coats and the pale, feathered hats had he not looked over his shoulder again. He saw Piers coming after him; he must have seen the impossibility of escape. His mouth opened but whatever sound came out was lost in the noise of the city. The man looked back again and he plunged off the curb into the onrushing propulsion of traffic.

There was the agonized scream of braking; there was the sudden roar of wonder from the crowd before it pressed ravenously towards this human sacrifice. In the moment when the mob stood awed, before it moved, Piers saw the mashed thing. Before the quick blast of the police whistle shrilled nearer, Piers had mingled with the north-bound stream of walkers again. There was no need to remain to give testimony.

Too many were there who could repeat, "He jumped in front of the cab. A man was chasing him."

What manner of man? A tall man in a dark suit. The streets were crowded with small men, middling men, tall men in dark suits.

Piers sauntered on without looking back. He moved steadily without outward evidence of the turmoil blackening his inward heart. He had sent a second man to meet death.

2.

THERE were red-mouthed women and waxed men on the shallow steps of the Astor. Piers walked through them into the lobby. It was crowded as always before theater time, afternoon and night, and after theater. The meeting place of the Forties, of Broadway. Piers had chosen it for precisely this transient quality, remembered from the past, unchanged in the present.

Music from the dining room floated to the

lobby below. Perfume and fresh flowers and barber lotions spilled from the mezzanine. There was constant motion, incessant sound, and anonymity. Piers joined the unhurried motion of the lobby, seeking without seeming to seek a face which did not belong here, a face that might match the one now lying under the cabbie's tire. He saw none.

His nerves hadn't quieted; his blood churned from the encounter. He would have a drink before going upstairs. He wanted to think, but he was afraid of thinking unless he could dull the edge of thought. He walked towards the bar and he saw, slanted in the doorway there, Gordon. He knew then it was too late for thinking. What had happened tonight was no longer of import. Gordon saw him. Gordon had been waiting for him.

"My God, Hunt," he said. "What are you doing here? I didn't believe it at first but it's you, all right."

"It's I," Piers said. He took the firm clasp. Gordon looked fit, handsome and competent as always. Without Piers' height, he was still the more commanding figure. Gordon always looked his best. He was face-handsome too. A good oblong face with strong chin, a dark well-clipped mustache over his rich mouth, dark blue eyes under straight brows, dark hair curling just enough above the broad tanned forehead. Women liked Gordon. Men liked him more perhaps. He was a man's man. Women were for the hours when work didn't press. Gordon's life was strong and ordered. Piers had never envied him more than he did in this moment.

Gordon said, "But I thought you were to hold the line in Berne?"

"I wasn't needed," Piers told him. "Nickerson had returned from Istanbul and Wiles was there. I particularly wanted to be in on this conference and I jumped at the chance to come unofficially." He smiled. He knew his smile, not sure of itself like Gordon's, a little smile, tentative.

"I'd have jumped at the chance to miss it." Gordon smiled his smile. "I've always thought you lucky to be the field assistant while I had to stay in Washington and listen to talk." He split a hammered red-gold cigarette case, heavy with monogram, passed it.

Piers refused. He had a like case; both were gifts from the Secretary. He never carried his. It was too rich for his blood. Gordon touched a gold lighter. "Did you travel with the old man?"

Piers said, "I said good-bye to him in Alex. I flew to Berne. It was only after I found Nickerson there that I decided to come over." He added to himself, "I haven't been home in twelve years."

Gordon took a whiff of his Turkish cigarette.

Piers laughed softly. "He doesn't know

I'm here. I tried to find him this afternoon in Washington but he wasn't in."

Gordon threw away the cigarette. He said, "He hasn't arrived."

Piers allowed a startled look to meet Gordon's steady one.

"We're explaining the delay by saying that he had business in South America."

"No," Piers said. He said it again, shaking his head. "No. One of us would have known."

Gordon asked with a pitiful eagerness, "Did you see him on the plane?"

"I put him on the plane myself," Piers answered. He added slowly, steadily, "I didn't know the pilot."

They stood there in silence, in the midst of sound. Piers broke through it. "I came in for a drink. Join me. I've just seen a man killed."

Gordon started. He followed Piers into the undersea light of the room, past close-set tables to the crowded bar. He said, "I can't accept death as casually as you, Piers. I suppose you learned its unimportance in combat service, while I learned nothing sitting in Washington."

Piers said, "Rye," to the barman.

"I'll stick to Scotch and splash," Gordon said.

PIERS turned to face him. "Death is often casual, Gordon. This one was. The man leaped in front of a traveling cab. A strange little man in a misfit coat and a new hat. The hat wasn't touched."

Gordon spoke with a tremor. "You looked at him."

Piers swallowed the rye neat. "It happened he was in my car coming up from Washington." He lit a cigarette from his crumpled package. "It isn't often that you see a second time someone you halfway notice in a restaurant or on a train. It's casual."

Gordon said, "I don't have your nerves, Piers. I'd be home in bed after an encounter like that." He smiled his particular smile. "Hoping the Cloutie hadn't followed."

Piers met his smile. "He looked like a commercial traveler. Nothing important." Gordon put down his glass unevenly.

"Someone in the crowd said a man was chasing him. But he got away. Another drink?"

Gordon touched a white linen handkerchief to his mustache. "Sorry. I'm with a party. I shouldn't have taken this long." He folded the handkerchief away. "It can't be that anything's happened to the old man. He must have stopped over somewhere."

"Not without telling us," Piers said.

"There's not a week before the conclave opens."

"What will happen if he doesn't come by then?"

Gordon spoke thoughtfully. "The President will appoint an acting secretary."

"One of us."

"Yes." His face was grave. "One of us." He had no doubt as to which one it would be.

Neither had Piers. He paid the check, started away from the bar.

Gordon halted him. "Where can I reach you? Where are you stopping?"

"The Plaza. I'll ring you in the morning."

They separated; he continued to the door. If Gordon tried to reach him there, he'd insist he'd said Savoy-Plaza. At the door, he paused. Standing there he could watch Gordon rejoin his table. For the moment his heart was constricted. And then his eyes cleared and he saw it wasn't she whom he feared it was.

It was a young girl with hair pale lavender in this light, dark purple eyes and a shimmering violet dress.

There were also at the table two quite ordinary young men. Disbelieving in the normal, he concentrated on the men. Neither looked as if he would recognize the jaundiced commercial traveler as a part of the human race. Each wore the face of Princeton or Yale, handsome, sure, protected. Gordon must have looked that way during the war when he was at a desk in Washington. Gordon hadn't lived in the land of death. He had never known the stench of human decay in his nostrils, the rivers of blood lapping his boots.

He was watching Piers from the table. Piers moved and turned outside the door as if he were seeking the 44th street exit. He waited for a moment in that corridor but no one came after him, and, avoiding the bar doorway, he made his way by the back corridor to the desk.

The sleek-haired clerk with the scent of dark carnation said, "No messages, Mr. Pierce." He passed across the key.

Piers scowled at it on his hand. He didn't want the clerk to identify face with name. He took the papers from the newstand, added a pack of cigarettes, and went to the elevators. No one was standing on watch; the activity of the hotel, intensified as curtain time grew nearer, was centered in the front lobby. Piers waited until the elevator cage was shut before he spoke the number. "Six."

They didn't know he was stopping at the Astor. They did know he visited the bar. Gordon couldn't have been there by accident. Someone wiser than he had suggested this particular bar. Someone, a pale lavender girl, two young men cut from a stereotyped pattern? And a slinking shadow frightened to death.

Piers left the elevator. He opened his door, locked it after him. He didn't make a light, the lights of Broadway shone gaudily.

As they shadowed, he crossed to the windows, opened them wide to the sound and the brightness of maelstrom below.

He stood, a frail reed, between this light and the darkness. He would not be eliminated. Not by a rat-like man with a scant yellow beard, not by the experts of European intrigue. Nor, he smiled, by the ambitions of Gordon and his sure, steady perfection.

He alone knew where the Secretary was. He alone knew the two unmarked graves in the African sand. Gordon was eaten with anxiety. Piers knew that Secretary Anstruther was dead.

II

PIERS had the morning papers sent to his room with breakfast. They were featuring the imminent International Peace Conclave as if nothing untoward had happened. Perhaps the press didn't know that Anstruther was missing.

Brecklein had arrived and—his nostrils narrowed—the dirty Schern. That arrogant sentimentalist, Dessaye, was here. The French again would toady to the stronger nations. Once France had been a strong nation. That was before his time, a part of history. Lord Evanhurst arrived today; with him Watkins. Piers could count on Watkins, but Watkins, like himself, was only an undersecretary. Evanhurst was one of the chief proponents of the withdrawal.

The Dominions were against it but they wouldn't fight the mother country, not if she were lined up with the United States. He didn't know about the Russians. China would vote with the States; South America with the majority. South Africa was for withdrawal; they were too far away to fear, and there was German blood. North Africa would follow Britain. As for Equatorial Africa, Black Africa, the important new province—it was an unknown quantity. It would go as Fabian willed. And Fabian's will was unknown. Piers feared its expression.

He searched the papers for news of Fabian but there was none. Perhaps the New York reporters didn't know the importance of the Secretary of Equatorial Africa. If he could get to Fabian, talk with him, he might possibly make him understand. Fabian might well hold the balance of power in the voting. Most of Asia would listen to what Fabian had to say. It was possible that South America would be swayed by him.

If he could find Fabian he could at least learn his reactions to the border incidents. He could demand an explanation of the telegram and its aftermath. He would know from the answer or the evasion if Brecklein had got to the African leader first.

The most important thing now was that he himself not die. Last night had proved he wasn't safe. The man who had followed him hadn't been the killer but he had been the first messenger from Death. Piers wasn't certain why he was being hunted. The most valid reason was because of his determination to block the withdrawal of the international military from Germany. There were a few, Watkins, Nickerson, Abrahmsky, Australia's Sandys, the young Czech delegate, all undersecretaries, all unimportant, who knew his convictions. But they believed his hands were tied as were their own.

It was improbable that this was the reason behind his being followed. The more unimportant causes were the more probable. Conceivably some of the schemers might believe that the Secretary of Peace was purposely remaining out of sight until the opening of the conclave in order that he might face it without the insinuating propaganda of the various legations. Granting this premise, Piers could be followed to lead to Secretary Anstruther's place of retirement. This premise did not carry the threat of death.

But if the intriguers knew that the Secretary would not appear at the opening of the conclave, it could be believed that Piers carried his final instructions. Careful as he had been, it could be known that he had the Secretary's papers. If certain nations did not wish these voiced, Piers would need to be eliminated within five days' time.

He didn't want to die. He liked work, fair fight, and the blue hills of adventure. He liked the stimulus of books. He liked long thoughts, and man, and some men. He liked earth in its greenness and in its barrenness; he liked the machine and the elements and the stars. Life was of him. It was he. He savored it and he gulped it. He didn't want to die.

He had spent four years during the Second World War in daily combat with death. He hadn't wanted to die then but he hadn't been afraid. Now he was afraid to die. The fear had nothing to do with fear of losing his identity. He didn't believe in oblivion. Death would be the new adventure. Nor had his fear to do with giving up this life.

He feared because if he died there was no one to fight for peace. There were multitudes who wanted peace. There were many who had forgotten war and some who had never known it. Even Watkins and Sandys could not fight for peace. It wasn't that they lacked courage or will; it was that they were not yet appointed. His was the appointment.

HE STOOD from the bed and crumpled the papers. Anstruther's death should not be without purpose. The old man had been good; he had had the simplicity of goodness. This was not enough when the apes stirred man to bestiality again. The good



"I didn't know that you knew Morn," said Gordon to Piers (Chap. IV)

could not stop the depredation. Only man who had risen from brute man, who recognized the evil gropings, could do that. Piers could and would do it.

He crossed to the window and stood there, unseen, looking down at Broadway below. Morning Broadway was a different street from that of night. There were few walkers; the policeman at the intersection was unharried. The police force was for the protection of honest citizens. What would the Commissioner do if Broadway demanded the police be removed from its environs? The idea was too ludicrous for consideration. The same idea for a different street should be laughed out of the peace conclave. It wouldn't be.

He wished he knew where to find Fabian. A plane whirled overhead. No one below looked up, no one burrowed for shelter. That was peace. There was a time when the sound of a plane had brought the terrible silence of fear.

He stretched his lean body and went towards the shower. He wasn't going to die. It would help, however, if he knew for certain who wanted him to die. It could be Gordon. Gordon intended to step into the old man's shoes. But Gordon didn't know that Anstruther was dead. And it would never occur to Gordon that Piers might be a contender for the post.

It must be Brecklein. Brecklein knew or sensed something. The exquisite German espionage system wouldn't be blotted out by twelve or twice twelve years. It would if anything be more preceptive by its enforced quiet. The presence of Schern as an envoy of appeal to the court wasn't by accident. Schern had been the key man in their intelligence during the Last War. The inner key. Piers knew that well.

He wasn't afraid of Brecklein or of his associates. He knew exactly how their minds would function; the traveling salesman was an example. He needn't be afraid of quick death at their hands. Their passion to know would insist that they first probe his motives and intentions.

The depression he'd brought home with him last night from Washington, result of a day of being shunted from one minor bureaucrat to another, had lifted. He didn't like the prospect of the inactive days ahead—the conclave would not open until Sunday, four days to wait—but it was an essential part of the plan. He could wait.

The phone rang as he was brushing his dust-colored hair. He scowled. No one knew a Mr. Pierce stopping at the Astor. No one but the clerk could call. Reflectively Piers moved to answer but his hand remained pressed down on the instrument. He turned away, finished dressing to the punctuation of its ringing.

He didn't take his room key to the desk.

The night clerk had put a name to him last night; it was possible the day clerk also would recognize him. He went out the side door onto 45th street. He walked over to Broadway, stood for a moment in the doorway of the Walgreen's drugstore on the corner. On impulse he cut into the street up to the traffic officer. He waited until the patrolman blew his whistle and lifted his white gloved hand for traffic change.

Piers stood equal in height if not in breadth to the officer. Assignment in Africa had worn him thin. He asked with the right careless curiosity, "Hear about the accident up the street last night?"

"Yeah. I wasn't on duty." He continued manipulating traffic as he spoke. "Did you witness it?"

"Not exactly. Not till it was over." Piers spoke with clear conscience and candid eyes. "Who was the fellow?"

"Don't know. If you were there last night you ought to report in to the Precinct. It's the Eighteenth, up on Fifty-fourth street. Captain Devlin is trying to round up all the witnesses."

"He must have been someone important," Piers said carelessly.

The policeman held traffic for two women and a little girl with dyed yellow curls. One of the women examined Piers. When they reached the curb, the cop blew his whistle. "Wasn't that. Only some of the witnesses say the guy was being chased."

"Sorry I was just too late." Piers moved on, lounging across to the east side of Broadway.

The officer didn't look after him. Doubtless took him for one of the unemployed actors who emerged at the late morning hour.

There was risk in it but he wanted to visit the precinct where the accident had been reported. Wisely he had changed to protective coloring today. The sand-brown gabardine, the panama, wouldn't fit a description of a dark suit and hat. No spectator could have described his face.

He walked on uptown. It was worth the chance for the possibility of finding out the fellow's name. A lost article. A briefcase. Lost in the excitement over the accident. A good enough excuse.

THE sergeant at the desk was big and red. He sucked his pen and exhaled, "What's yours?"

Piers stated without preamble, "I lost my briefcase last night. By any chance has it been turned in here?"

The sergeant had a list of questions, routine for lost and found.

Piers avoided name and address, describing, "Alligator, brown. Papers in it."

"What kind of papers?"

He smiled, deciding to hold his imagination to a guise which would fit. "Plays.

Manuscript plays, that is."

The sergeant's nose didn't consider that of much importance.

"It was a good briefcase," Piers insisted. "Good alligator." He continued answering the queries. "It was somewhere in the Paramount block. I think it must have been knocked from my hand when the accident occurred."

When he spoke the word "accident" the blue disinterested eyes suddenly became crisp as china.

"The guy that jumped in front of a taxi?"

"Fell or jumped or was pushed," Piers said. He said it blithely, as if he'd taken part in a sidewalk session.

"You want to see Captain Devlin," the sergeant nodded. He got to his feet as if they pained him.

Piers let his voice follow eagerly. "Does he know about my briefcase?" He lighted a cigarette after the officer disappeared. This was better than he had expected, a first-hand talk with the captain. He was curious as to whether the police had discovered the dead man to be important or whether this was normal procedure. If the latter, the police were to be respected for their careful regard for death.

The old sergeant stuck his head through the door. "You, there. Come on in. Captain says he wants to see you."

"Certainly."

Piers followed the man down a corridor into a drab box of a room. It was furnished with a too large desk, an old wooden bench and chair, a calendar portraying an Indian girl stepping into a birch canoe, and a large brass cuspidor. The man behind the desk was large, gray-haired, ruddy-faced.

"I'm Captain Devlin. Sit down, Mister."

The sergeant sat on the chair. Piers lounged easily on the old bench.

"Your name?" Captain Devlin asked. He had a green pencil. His desk was assorted with papers.

"George Henderson." Piers didn't hesitate. He'd been Thompson in Washington, he was Pierce at the Astor, but Henderson came easily to his lips. Always he used ordinary names. "I lost my briefcase—it's of brown alligator."

"Yeah," Captain Devlin interrupted. "Your address, Mr. Henderson?"

They couldn't be meaning to detain him while they checked on this. He was an innocent bystander. He said as if he were slightly ashamed of it, "It's seventeen Sheridan Square." He had been born at 17 Sheridan Square. He hoped the building still stood.

"I'm staying with friends there—it's just temporary. I expect to get a place of my own soon. I'm a playwright." He gave the captain a smile both proud and happy, and then he frowned a little. "My newest

manuscripts are in that briefcase and it's very important I find it. I don't want to have to type the whole thing again—" He prattled, at ease in his role.

The captain interrupted again. "You witnessed the accident in front of the Paramount last night?"

"But I didn't. I was right there but I was walking the other way. I just missed it."

The captain's square face took on a shade of disappointment. "You don't know if he fell or was pushed then?"

"No," Piers said. "I'm sorry. Everyone was terribly excited, all talking at once. Some said the man jumped and some said he was pushed. I was late for an appointment. It wasn't until I was in the theater later that I missed my briefcase. It's been turned in?"

The sergeant said, "No. Nothing good ever is."

Piers was emphatic. "I'd hate to lose it. It means so much work—" His eyes were bright with curiosity. "Who was the man who was killed? You think he was pushed?"

Captain Devlin shook his head. "We don't think he was pushed. But some of the witnesses say he was."

Piers waited, taut. He couldn't repeat his question. He mustn't be anything but a naive young playwright. He could play the role. His face was unlined, boyish enough for his thirty-six years.

"He wasn't anyone at all," Devlin continued. "John Smith."

"John Smith," Piers repeated to hide his disappointment. "That's like a play, Captain. That anyone should actually be named John Smith."

"It was his name." Devlin tapped his pencil. "He was identified late last night. By his uncle. We could write it off as closed if it weren't for those two damn witnesses insisting he was pushed."

Piers said thoughtfully as if weaving a plot, "And of course that means the uncle will press you—"

"He doesn't give a damn. He doesn't think the guy was pushed." Devlin was grim. The Commissioner don't like loose ends. "Well, young man, if your briefcase turns up, we we'll notify you."

Piers said, "Thank you, sir." He followed the sergeant back into the outer room.

"John Smith," he said. "A real John Smith."

The sergeant gruffed, "He musta changed it from Schmidt. The old man could hardly talk English."

2.

LEAVING the precinct station, he seemed to be leaving safety behind. He felt an impulse to turn back, to tell the dull and honest sergeant, the worried and rigid cap-

tain, "I am in danger. Will you give me protection before I lie beside John Smith?"

He could not. Where would he get accusing Brecklein, the accredited German envoy to the Peace Conclave? He would be dismissed as a crank, or worse, he would be detained for observation. He had no proof. That the final comment of the old sergeant was for him proof sufficient that the Germans were after him did not mean that he was without understanding of the nebulous quality of this proof for others.

He would have liked to elicit a description of the uncle. But in retrospect it might have awakened suspicion. As much as he would welcome police protection, he could not afford to become the object of police suspicion. His hope was that he would escape attention, that there would be no reason for them to seek one George Henderson.

He walked back to Broadway. It would be wise to call Gordon before the man called him. He stopped at a drugstore, looked up the number of the New York branch of the Peace Department. Normally the branch office wasn't important but with the Conclave at hand Gordon would make his headquarters there.

Three times he gave his name, Piers alone, waiting permission to speak to the important Gordon. One voice actually spoke of Secretary Gordon. Gordon knew how to erect a structure.

He was eventually put through to the rich assurance of that voice. "Piers? The girl said Mr. Pierce and I couldn't place it. I rang you but the hotel desk said you weren't there."

"I went out early," Piers evaded. "Any word from the Secretary?"

The warm cadence was troubled. "No. I don't know what to think." He broke off. "Lunch with me, Piers. It's important we decide what we're to do."

"To do?" Piers asked softly.

"Yes. Make it the Chatham at one. It's secluded, we can talk without disturbance."

Piers rang off. Gordon was disturbed. It was good that Gordon be disturbed. As long as he could be kept in that state he wouldn't be able to move swiftly, without deviation, to the coveted goal.

Piers decided against returning to the hotel. Whoever had rung his room might be waiting his appearance. He didn't believe the call could be any more than a clerk's inquiry; yet . . . Yet until last night he hadn't believed it was known to anyone that he was in New York.

He covered leisurely the path between the towering flanks of Rockefeller Center to Fifth. The shop windows were summer bright; tulips bloomed in the gardens. As he moved, a shadow seemed to move with him.

It could be he was overly alert. He moved

on Fifth, still leisurely, with curiosity, no fear. There was nothing to fear at high noon in this not only crowded but highly civilized sector of the avenue. If he were followed, he would like to know if it stemmed from the hotel or the precinct house. The latter was more probable.

John Smith hadn't completed his assignment last night. But John Smith's uncle, or the-friends-of-my-uncle, might well be watching who would call at the station. It was undeniable that members of Brecklein's party would recognize Piers Hunt. Brecklein wouldn't leave that to chance.

He walked slowly down Fifth, allowing the swift tempo of the street to stream past him. He could make certain he was not trailed before returning to the Astor. He reached the Chatham slightly before one o'clock, left his hat with the quiet elderly man at the hatstand, and waited in the red velvet foyer. It was cool, empty. The hushed room beyond had but a few diners.

GORDON came at one-ten. He said, "Glad you could make it, Piers," and, "Good afternoon, Bronson," as if the checkman were a private club employee.

"I hadn't anything else to do," Piers said with amusement. "I haven't any friends to look up. My grandmother—last of the family—died years ago."

Gordon led into the dining room. He nodded to none of the other diners. Each waiter they passed spoke, "Good day, Mr. Gordon." To the maître d'hôtel he said, "The corner spot, Jules?"

"Certainement, Mr. Gordon."

It was secluded, a rounded couch that commanded the room. There could be no eavesdropping.

"You'll have a Martini? Very dry for me, Jules." He was a good host. He suggested the whitefish with a superb sauce, pale wine, a mixed salad.

"Not hearty," Gordon apologized. "Too hot."

He was filled with anxiety. His healthy face, his manners, couldn't hide it. He spoke over the cocktail, "What can have happened, Piers?"

Piers watched him over the rim of his glass. "Perhaps he stopped off in South America."

"No. That's what I've told the President and the Secretary of State, but no. Not unless he told you—"

"He didn't plan any stopover," Piers said. Gordon worried it. "There's been no plane accident reported."

Piers said, "Perhaps it's a disappearance." Gordon looked quickly.

"There have been cases. Planes disappearing."

"That's weird." Gordon smiled, but his smile wasn't sure.

"Weird but possible," Piers said. "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of . . ."

"No." Gordon rejected. "I don't believe that."

"What do you believe?" Piers asked softly.

"I don't know. He's long overdue. You saw him off?"

"A week ago Monday."

"When did you arrive here?"

"Friday last."

Gordon laid down his fork. "Friday? You've been here that long? Why didn't you let me know?"

Piers took his time. "I needed a rest. I knew you'd put me to work if I showed up, Gordon."

Gordon shook his head.

"I had a vacation due. You don't know how fatiguing field work can be. Particularly just before a conclave."

"You didn't know the old man wasn't here?"

Piers shrugged. "Not until I went to Washington yesterday." His brows went up. "Those clerks in the Peace Department don't hide things well, Gordon. I daresay Washington's seething with rumors."

"Rumors can't hurt us," Gordon replied. "The worst they can say is that he's sick." He scowled. "What I'm afraid of is fact. When the fact that he's missing becomes known—as it must by Sunday—"

"You're afraid the Conclave will fall to pieces?"

"Yes—no, that can't happen, Piers. Biennial meetings. Members convening from all over the globe—do you know we're to have almost full representation this time? It can't collapse. But without him to hold it steady—" Gordon leaned across the table. "I believe it is paramount we let no one know in advance that the old man may not be present."

"Yes," Piers said.

"If that were known, I don't know what feuds might flare up. He's always kept them down. He's believed in International Peace."

"Yes," Piers said again. "You've hit it, Gordon." He looked at him for a moment almost with envy. "That belief of Anstruther's and a few others has kept the peace this far. That belief must go on. If the believers can keep it flaming long enough we'll breed out war. But you must have men who have as passionate a belief in peace as once certain men had in war."

Gordon said slowly. "It isn't war I'm afraid of. If you keep the nations prospering they're content. No need for war. And when there isn't a need for an element, it disappears."

"If you aren't afraid of war, then what?"

Gordon said, "I want our country to maintain its place as the leader in International Peace."

He closed the Venetian blinds, then turned on the desk lamp. (Chap. III)



"A nationalist," Piers smiled. Gordon might well have said: I want to be as important as Anstruther has been. I want to hold that most important cabinet post, Secretary of Peace of the United States; I want to be hereditary president of the Conclave.

Gordon reddened, defending himself, "Maybe, Piers. But if you'd been in my place in Washington these years— We've made this Peace thing. We've forced it to work. I don't want to see our place threatened if anything's happened to the old man."

Piers took his tea scalding, plain. "I don't think it's important who stands for what in the Conclave, as long as all stand for peace."

"An internationalist." Gordon smiled now. "Perhaps it's just that peace is more important to me than any man or any nation."

Gordon bit his lip. "We haven't decided what to do. It's up to us to carry things along—at least until the Conclave is in session. You'll help out?"

Piers didn't commit himself. He asked rather, "How did you know I was here, Gordon?"

Gordon flushed and then he laughed. "I'd been looking for you. Nickerson cabled you were coming."

Not Nickerson. Wiles, perhaps, but not Nickerson. Piers had definitely stated that this was a Z-13 mission; that meant utter secrecy. Gordon didn't know that.

"I sent a cable to you—Z code—about the whereabouts of Anstruther. Nickerson replied that you were in this country."

Possibly. But not Nickerson.

"And the Astor?" Piers' eyes smiled.

"I'd tried all the hotels. You're not under your name?"

"No," Piers admitted.

"I remembered that evening in Berne—three years ago, wasn't it? Your weltschmerz for New York, in particular Broadway and the Astor."

Piers said, "Good deducing. I might use you on a mission some day."

Gordon lettered the check. He looked up from it to Piers' face. "Why did you come to New York?"

"To attend the Conclave." He pushed back from the table. "I've been determined for a long time to attend this particular conclave, Gordon."

3.

THEY stood for a moment at the door.

Gordon said, "I wish you'd bring your papers to the office, Piers. If we went over them we might find a hint."

"I don't have papers."

Gordon didn't believe him. "Your reports?"

"I take notes in my head. Dictate from memory."

It was inconceivable to Gordon, Gordon

of the great mahogany desk in Washington, the disciplined files.

"Reports aren't my job, Gordon. It's the human equation I contend with, the subterfuge, the cross-currents. It comes out all right in the end."

They stood on the corner of Park.

"I'll look over your papers if you like," he suggested.

"You needn't," Gordon said abruptly. "Don't think I haven't been over and over them, particularly the reports the old man sent on this trip. I don't know why you needed him in Africa. If he hadn't gone there— Those little border troubles—"

Those little border troubles had been too carefully brewed. Piers had needed Secretary Anstruther. If the Secretary saw for himself, he would, despite Evanhurst, refuse Germany's request. He would sway the Conclave to his belief.

Gordon said, "I must get back to the office. I want you to come along with me tomorrow night. A small dinner Lord Evanhurst is giving."

Piers shook his head. "You'll have to handle that yourself. I've been in the bush too long."

"Nonsense," Gordon jeered. His eyes turned somber. "It isn't merely social."

"Will Fabian be there?" He forgot to be cautious.

"Fabian?"

"Equatorial Africa."

"I know," Gordon said impatiently. "But you know he doesn't ever appear. Fancies himself sort of a black monk. This will be only major powers. A small dinner." He laid his hand on Piers' arm. "I think you should be present, Piers. He's having the German group. Purposely."

Piers accepted. "I'll be delighted to come." His mouth narrowed. "I want to meet Brecklein."

"You haven't?"

"Somehow I've missed that. I've even missed Schern. By the skin of my teeth during the Last War."

Gordon said, "That's right, you were in Intelligence, weren't you?"

"Part of the time." He turned. "Thanks for lunch. Tomorrow night then."

"Sevenish. I'll pick you up."

"I'll probably be out. Where can I meet you?"

"I'm at the Waldorf," Gordon said with hidden pride. He hesitated. "I didn't see any report of your dead man in the papers. Did you learn any details?"

"Only his name," Piers said. "Johann Schmidt." His eyes remained candid on Gordon's as he spoke. But brown eyes were opaque. They could hide what lighter pigments gave away. . . .

He knew he was followed now. He stopped for a shoeshine. He dallied at shop windows.

Each time he stopped, each time he set out, the same shadow dogged his steps. He was beginning to fill out the outline, a burly man, tall, in a dark shapeless suit, a shapeless fedora pulled not too far over his eyes. A chain, glinting in the sun, across a protruding vest. Feet that walked heavily as if they'd been used too long. This follower was not sly as last night's had been. Nor inept. This man no matter how the game was played would follow.

He must be eliminated before Piers turned back towards the Astor. He followed Fifth Avenue as it led, the crowds growing more thin and more rich as he entered the upper Fifties. He turned left at 59th and headed for the Plaza. He passed the weathered stone fountain, entered the dignified portals.

Within the lobby, he moved slowly, waiting to see if the man behind him would enter. He didn't wait long. The bulk bought a newspaper and sat down in one of the old velvet chairs. The newspaper hid the sagging jowls, not the eyes. Under the hat brim these watched without seeming to watch.

PIERS walked to the desk. He said, "I am Piers Hunt." The clerk hadn't been here long enough to remember the young boy who had lived with his grandmother in that sky suite overlooking the park. Cornelia Piers who had died after Munich, before Dunquerque. This empty man didn't know that the scent of velvet and polished wood had remained with Piers through blood and flame and thunder, and after, through the years of labor for peace.

Piers smiled a little when the clerk's impassive face expressed only impassivity. He said, "I should like a room here." He made the arrangements, paying a week in advance. "My luggage will be around later. Will you arrange to have it unpacked, if you please?" He took the key, refusing to go up to the room. It would hold little resemblance to the exquisite tower where Cornelia Piers had lived and died.

He would send a couple of bags around sometime today. He had no intention of using this room; it was no more than a number which Gordon could call. He would ring Gordon in the morning to report he had now registered under his own name. He smiled again realizing how much more acceptable a Piers Hunt at the Plaza would be to Gordon than one at the Astor.

Without import as it seemed, Gordon's snobbery had been of undeniable value to the man and to the cementing of his position in Washington. One who acted from innate instincts alone could not conceive the importance these niceties assumed to men whose consciousness of the right thing was born out of study and decision.

Piers walked to the door. He paused long enough to observe the faint reflection of the

man in the glass. He was folding the paper. It was almost four o'clock, time to throw off the tracker if he was to see about Plaza luggage before returning to the Astor.

But once outside in the warm spring he was reluctant to return to shop windows. The park lay at hand. He followed the winding path, moving into spring and forgetfulness. There was scent of budding tree, of grass roots pushing from the deeps of soil to sun and color. Children played on the slopes, their voices calling out in the very joy of sound and movement. There were lovers, two by two, silent in their joy and as heedless of their insecurity as were the children.

None knew that even now, in this very city, there were men plotting to threaten their peace, to plunge the world again into destruction and death.

He sat down on the bench, took off his hat in order that the small wind might cool his burning head. Anger, the anger that flooded him whenever he thought of any man daring to threaten the continuation of peace, was no weapon. The weapons he should use were the weapons Gordon would employ, careful consideration of incidents, the right relationship with the right men, cerebral action, not that of spirit. Gordon could help him.

Piers didn't know for certain that Gordon was pledged to the viewpoint of Lord Evan-hurst, that Gordon had been influenced without knowing it by the wily Schern or convinced by Brecklein's weight. All he had for basis of his belief was that brief discussion with Anstruther the night before the old man was to return to Washington. Anstruther had said of his own convictions, "I don't. I believe Gordon thinks we should withdraw."

Even if that was Gordon's opinion, Piers should have confidence in his own power to change it. He didn't like Gordon, but Gordon wouldn't hesitate to use someone with whom he was not in sympathy. That was why Gordon had importance.

He was afraid of Gordon's help. Gordon was wise in the ancient ways of ape diplomacy. He must play it alone, knowing there was a small nucleus who would stand with him if he were allowed to speak.

He saw the burly man then, seated on the bench below him taking his ease. He didn't like that man. He didn't like being followed. It was time to do something about it.

THE policeman was still there on the path. Piers walked to him. The policeman turned a helpful face. Piers said, "That man—on the bench there—is following me. I don't like being followed."

The policeman's face waded with doubt, alert doubt. Another crackpot, it said.

Piers insisted. "You don't believe me.

I'm going to walk past him. You watch. He'll follow."

"Why's he following you?"

"You might ask him. And tell him that if he doesn't stop, I'm going to do something about it."

He moved leisurely, past the bench where the heavy man sat. He was only a few paces past when he heard the abused rumble, "Do I got to get a cop's permission to leave Central Park?"

Piers moved rapidly and caught a cab just before reaching the mouth of the entrance. He rode to Abercrombie's. No cab followed. He selected a large suitcase and a small one, good expensive leather; gave a list of everything necessary.

He would present the luggage to Gordon when this was all over. He paid, gave his name and address, The Plaza, asked that they be sent around tomorrow. Lest the clerk be suspicious and check with the hotel, he mentioned luggage overdue from the continent.

His spirits were light when he went back out on Madison. His trailer was lost; he was respectably housed for Gordon's curiosity without losing his necessary anonymity. He took a cab to the Astor. An iced drink before going to his room for a shower and change. There was no reason to hurry. He could dine when he pleased, go around later to a theater.

The bar was crowded. He took his place at the far end and ordered a daiquiri. He saw the lavender-haired girl moving between the tables in some sort of lavender afternoon dress. Her eyes were on Piers.

He was slightly disturbed when he realized she was moving to him. He stood waiting, still watching her until she was directly in front of him. He saw then that her hair was flaxen and her dress white. He saw that she was very young.

Her voice was quiet. "Where is my father?"

He said, "I believe you've mistaken me for someone."

She said, "I am Bianca Anstruther," and he didn't speak. She repeated, "Where is my father?"

He answered then. "I don't know."

He noticed her hands, the fingers clenched.

She said, "You were the last person to see my father. Witt told me last night."

Witt must be Gordon. DeWitt Gordon.

Piers said, "I put him on the plane. I don't know where he is. Will you join me in a drink, Miss Anstruther? I'd like to talk with you."

She said, "I'm with friends. There's no need to talk. Simply answer my question—"

"I believe there is. If you can spare me a few moments."

She glanced over her shoulder and he saw the table. A round white hat, lavender now,

marked her place. There was a young man. And there was Hugo von Eynar.

For the moment he was stone. He hadn't expected von Eynar. Now it was complete, the trinity. Brecklein to weigh with the financiers, Schern to scheme with the politicians; von Eynar, the slender golden aristocrat, to charm the recalcitrant. For a moment he regretted the imposing of this appointment on himself. He regretted it while his eyes searched for the one who must be there with Hugo but who was not.

He moved again. "Do your friends know what you came to ask me?"

She shook her head slightly. "I said I wished to speak to an old friend."

He took her arm then and moved her to a table. He stopped a waiter, asked, "Miss Anstruther?"

She shook her head.

"Two daiquiris." He demanded of her, "Do you realize how carefully Gordon is guarding the secret of your father's absence?"

She was scornful. "Certainly."

"And why no one must know?"

SCORN continued to twist her mouth. "I understand how important my father's work is. Do you think I would do anything to jeopardize it?" Her eyes burned into his. "But I want to know where he is."

"Believe me, I would like to tell you."

"He left in a private plane?"

"Yes."

"Who was with him?"

"He was alone. That wasn't unusual, Miss Anstruther. He flew all over the five continents alone."

"He was to transfer in Lisbon to the Clipper?"

"Yes."

"He never reached Lisbon."

Piers said evenly, "No, he never reached Lisbon."

The waiter set the frosted glasses. Piers said, "I'm no enemy. You needn't be afraid to drink with me."

She lifted the glass. "I'm not afraid," she said. She drank and she asked, "What did you do after he left Alexandria?"

"I flew to Berne. My orders."

"When? That same day?"

He spoke with care. "I had two days' work before I could get away."

"And you heard no report of a missing plane?"

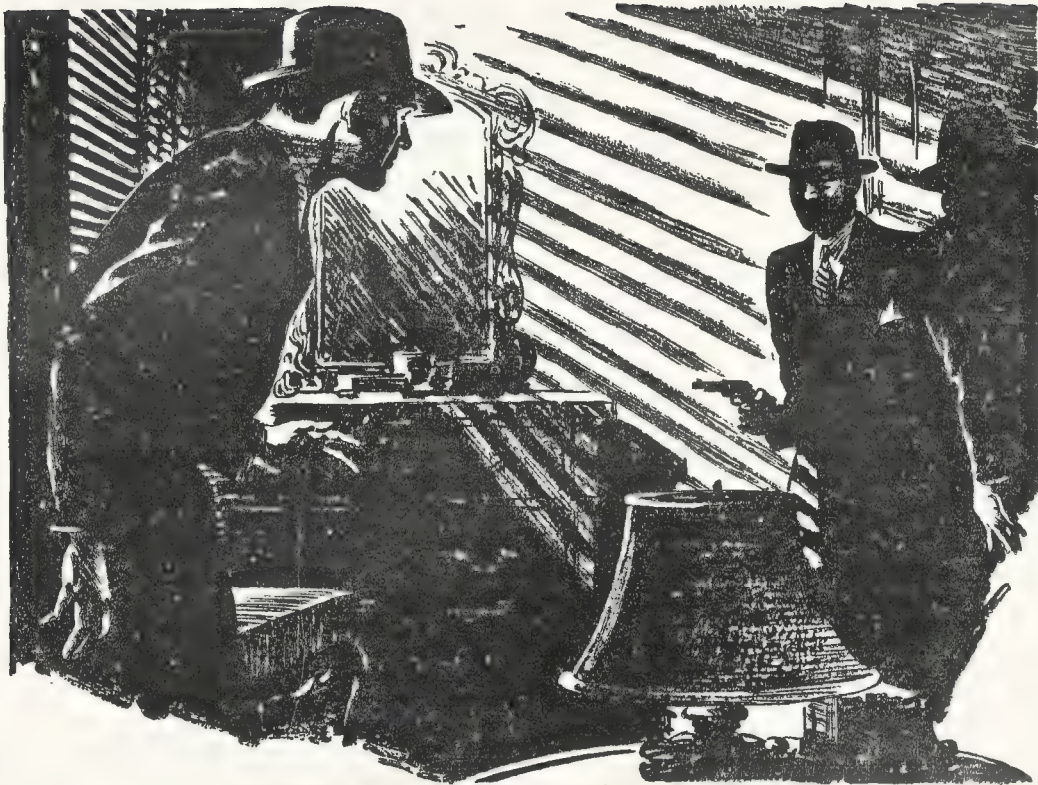
"There was no report." He spoke with finality.

She sipped again. "Who was his pilot?"

"I had never seen the pilot before."

She seized avidly on this. "But that wasn't usual."

"I know. But I didn't know that the pilot was unknown to Secretary Anstruther. However, after the Secretary had taken off, when



Piers had no intention of moving against a gun (Chap. IV)

I realized I did not know the pilot, I made inquiries as to who he was."

"Then you sensed something was wrong?"

"Perhaps," he admitted.

"Who was he—the pilot?"

"A German, Gundar Abersohn. He'd been in the Luftwaffe during the Last War."

The glass trembled as she set it down. She said, "I think he's dead. Witt thinks he's dead. He won't say it, but he thinks so."

"He is disturbed," Piers admitted.

"What do you think?" she demanded suddenly.

Piers spread his hands. "I don't know. But there have been plane disappearances before now."

"An accident. But there are always traces."

"Not always."

She shivered. "That isn't normal."

"It isn't. Nor is your father's disappearance."

She insisted, "You think he's dead too."

"I wouldn't say it," he said. "Gordon won't say it. You should be careful not to let anyone read your thoughts. It could do untold harm. Anyone."

She said, "I'm always careful. I told you that."

Not careful in her friend, however. What was she doing in the company of Hugo von Eynar? How had she met him? Through Gordon, perhaps. That could mean that Gordon was definitely committed to act with

Evanhurst. But if the German envoys believed the Secretary would return, they could set Hugo to charm the daughter.

He said, "You give your perturbation away. And you've talked too long with me. Your friends are restless. What will you tell them?"

She smiled. It lighted her face, gave her the look she should have worn with her youth. "I'll tell them you are of the Secretary's office. That will excite them. They have a great admiration for my father." She added as she stood from the table, "They're both with Peace departments, English and German. I'll tell them about you and they won't talk of my father."

"Do you know anything about me?"

She nodded, solemn again. "I know more about you than you think, Mr. Hunt."

She was gone. He watched her go. And he watched the blond German rise as she reached her chair.

III

THERE was nothing he could do for Bianca Anstruther. He left the bar, went directly to the desk. The same carnationed clerk said, "Good evening, Mr. Pierce."

Piers said, "I have my key. Any messages?"

The man pried into the box. "None."

"My phone was ringing this morning, just after I left my room. I hadn't time to return."

The clerk said, "I'll ask the operator. She might have a record." He returned after a moment. "There was a call to your room but no name, Mr. Pierce."

He said, "It couldn't have been important," and turned away to the newsstand. He saw the burly man then. He was standing against a pillar. He was incongruous in this sleek Broadway lobby. Piers turned back to the clerk. "I'd like to see the house detective."

The venerated mask cracked for a moment. "Is there anything wrong, sir?"

"There is," Piers stated. "A man has followed me all afternoon. He is here now. I don't like it." He paused and his eye fixed the clerk. "I'd prefer that your house detective handle it."

The clerk mouthed quickly, "Yes, sir. Certainly, sir." He tinkled a bell and spoke hushed to the answering boy. "Will you find Mr. Sarachon at once?" His voice broke. "You should speak to the police, sir."

"I have," Piers replied. "Evidently the man was released with a warning."

Mr. Sarachon was dressed for the evening, impeccable thinning hair, polished nails, soft black hat. A piece of Broadway, the aristocracy of Broadway.

The clerk said, "Mr. Sarachon, this is Mr. Pierce. A guest of the hotel."

Piers took over. "There's a man, who despite police intervention, has followed me here. I'd rather like it if you could get rid of him."

"Why is he following you?"

"I don't know," Piers said wearily. "I've conducted government business all over Europe and Africa without ever having been followed." That wasn't quite true. "Now I'm on vacation, in my own country. I don't know why he's following me. I don't like it."

Mr. Sarachon said smoothly, "I'll do what I can, Mr. Pierce if you'll point him out."

Piers pointed. "The unimpressed fellow over there."

Mr. Sarachon's eyelids drooped. He walked towards the man, his steps brisk, assured. Piers leaned against the newsstand. He couldn't see Sarachon's face, only his mobile shoulders. Sarachon's return was hesitant.

"Well?" Piers demanded.

Sarachon rubbed his right hand fingers against his tuxedo coat sleeve. He said, "I'm afraid I can do nothing for you, Mr. Hunt. That man is Jake Cassidy. Detective first grade of the New York police force."

Piers took it slowly. "You knew who he was before you spoke to him, didn't you?"

"I knew he was Cassidy," the house detective admitted. "I thought he might be off the force, in which case I could have

done something. However, he's still active. And the New York force—"

"I understand," Piers said. "Thanks just the same." He walked away to the elevators, leaving behind Sarachon's disturbed polish, the clerk's snide face, Cassidy's imperturbable stance. Cassidy knew the man he was following. The house detective had addressed him as Mr. Hunt only after he spoke with the heavy man.

SAFE in his room he closed the door, leaving the room unlighted save by Broadway flares. He drew a chair to the window, sat there. He was being followed by a New York detective. Why? Was it in connection with Johann Schmidt's death? Was it for some more important reason? He had suspected a shadow after he left the precinct house. He had been certain of it after he parted with Gordon at the Chatham. If Cassidy had picked up the earlier trail, the visit to the police hadn't been as successful as he had thought.

Having his suspicion of Brecklein's delegation confirmed was worth whatever difficulties might now ensue. At least he could label the enemy. If, however, Captain Devlin had set Cassidy on his trail, how had the detective learned the name was Piers Hunt?

If his trail had been taken up later, with Gordon, it was easier to understand how he had been identified. Gordon had spoken over the office phone. This did not explain why the New York detective department should be interested in Piers Hunt. Unless Johann Schmidt had existed long enough to exhale a man's name.

If his own path were straight he could welcome Cassidy's supervision. God knows he needed protection. He couldn't afford its luxury as yet. He could trust no one; no matter what dangers he was led into, he must walk alone. The end was more important than he.

The small face of the girl with lavender hair kept glimmering in the shade of his room. He had known that Anstruther had a daughter; he conceived of her as a little girl. The Secretary had referred to her always as his little girl. He had mentioned schools: "I must be in New York before my daughter's vacation begins." "I must be home before my little girl returns from the country." Little girls grew up.

Piers hadn't realized that Bianca was a young woman. He regretted it. The business was ticklish enough without this complication. His sympathy for her couldn't even be hinted. She would not forgive him for prolonging her anxiety, postponing her grief. After this was over he should like to help her.

He was tired. Another day gone but four yet to pass before he dared move. If he could be sure of success, the game would be

worth its candle. He couldn't be. Not without Evanhurst or Fabian. There seemed little hope of Evanhurst. He moved from his chair, made a light and stretched himself on the bed. He went over the newspapers he had bought. There was only one item worth attention, a noted Washington columnist had written: "Secretary Anstruther remains in retirement pending the opening of the international Peace Conclave on Sunday."

Piers pushed away the papers. He might as well go out into the dinner and theater crowds. Dinner wasn't important but the theater would black out memory for a too brief number of hours. First a shower and change of clothes.

He pulled out the uppermost bureau drawer. The drawer had been searched. He opened each of the others. They too had felt intrusive fingers. It was not that the contents were tumbled. It was rather the small disarrangement. Had not years of fending for himself in limited space given him an inordinate taste for order, he might not have noticed the intrusion.

He went without haste to the clothes closet. The suits as well. The spacing was different. He pulled out his two suitcases, large and small, opened each in turn. The linings were intact. He hadn't expected the consideration. Yet a finger touch could have told that no papers were secreted. Whoever had searched was after the papers of Secretary Anstruther. His lips curled away from his teeth. There were no papers here.

It amused rather than angered him that his room had been searched. There was a bribe—if access had been result of bribery—wasted. He bathed, dressed leisurely. He put on the dark suit again. It didn't matter its repetition, not with his detective escort. He pocketed his key, went out and walked the few steps to the elevator.

The lobby was a different world, a world of cacophony and light. It even seemed safe. For a moment he hesitated. He could remain here; he didn't have to wander tonight. It was absurd that he dreaded to emerge from his fox's hole, absurd to fear the street because of an accident pattern that must not be uncommon.

HE HAD hungered for years to return to this garish and, to him, precious sector of the universe. He should have belonged to the theater world. His mother had been a Piers, yes, but she had been Cornelia Piers' own daughter. Not only had she married Horace Hunt, the leading character actor of his generation; she had not imported him into her world; she had joined his. Piers had been figuratively born in a trunk. That the trunk had been a luxurious one proved only that Horace Hunt had been a laborer worthy of his highly appraised hire.

Piers had been ten years old when he moved to Cornelia's after his mother died. He didn't remember her well; he remembered rather Cornelia's portraits of her. Of what she had been there was for memory only the scent of red roses, laughter, the feel of silk.

His father had died in the Last War. An airplane crash while he was touring the camps as entertainer. Piers and his father had remained good friends always; separated sometimes for years by Horace Hunt's moving picture commitments, separated by a sequence of young and younger stepmothers, their friendship hadn't faltered. He had wanted to follow his father on the boards before the war came. After the war it hadn't been important enough.

Only one thing had been important after that war, to work for peace. Luck had brought him to Samuel Anstruther who needed young men with militant belief in peace. For twelve years he had been Secretary Anstruther's personal representative in Europe and Africa; Gordon had held the all-important Washington post. The under-leadership was divided between Gordon and himself.

He was the trouble shooter called in before trouble could brew. There had been more trouble in the formative years. The past five years had been more or less uneventful. Man, given assurance that he might have peace, had been eager to cooperate in its furtherance, far more determined than he had been in the past to cooperate in the cyclic necessity for war.

Until these border incidents had begun. The government of South Africa had reported them in March. The instigators were held by Europeans to be of Equatorial Africa. That was the expected. What was not expected was that Piers' independent investigating proved that only Germans had reported trouble. It was the sinister echo, out of the not too long ago past, of German voices howling of persecution.

He had waited for Fabian to report his finding to the commission. And Fabian had not spoken. That Piers could not understand. With charges made against his people, Fabian had blanketed Equatorial Africa in immutable silence. Piers' request for discussion with Fabian had been swallowed up in that silence. It was then that Piers had secretly sent word to Secretary Anstruther. If any man could reach Fabian, it was Anstruther. If any man could see through the manipulations against peace, it was Anstruther. It was in the midst of this secret conference that the wire from Fabian had come. And Anstruther had gone to meet death.

With first report of the trouble had descended this enveloping depression. Piers knew history too well not to realize that war

had more than once started from just such seemingly unimportant friction. The incidents were no more than smokescreen for the dread events shaping behind them.

He put away his dark thoughts. The heat of his mind must cool, give him respite in order to give him strength. He would go out, join Broadway. He started to the doors but seeing the ungainly bulk of Cassidy slouched against the same pillar, Piers diverted his steps.

He stood before the man. "Come along."

"What you talking about?"

Piers said, "Dinner and the theater. You're coming, aren't you?"

Cassidy shifted his feet. "It's none of your business where I go, is it? Or is it?"

Piers smiled. "I'm just making it easy for you. I might get lost in the crowd, you know."

"Suits me." Cassidy studied his thumb. "If you get lost, I'll find you again. New York isn't so big."

"I know," Piers admitted.

"You'd come out by Sunday." Cassidy wasn't interested but he knew something he shouldn't know.

Piers spoke easily. "Can I stand you a drink before we start out?"

CASSIDY should have refused. But he'd had a long vigil and his feet must have hurt. The bar was near with sweet and acrid odors.

He said finally, reluctantly, "I could use a beer."

The bar was a little less crowded now, the dinner hour. There was no sign of Bianca Anstruther and her party. Cassidy pulled out a chair at a small table. "Bottle of Budweiser," he said.

"You won't mind if mine's an aperitif, Mr. Cassidy?"

"How do you know my name?" Cassidy wasn't at ease.

"I made inquiries."

Cassidy struggled with deep thought. "That damn Sarachon. Used to play the drums in a band here."

"Perhaps." Piers held across a light. "I don't suppose you'd tell me why you're following me?"

"Who said I was following you?"

Piers' look was level and ironic. "I can't believe your private tastes are as catholic as the greensward of the park and the bar of the Astor. I've followed men myself in my time. I presume now that I've spotted you there'll be a new man put on me."

"That don't make no difference," Cassidy said.

Piers sipped. "It surprises me that you should be the shadow."

"Why's that?" The demand was belligerent.

"I should say that the New York detective

force would not be interested in my itinerary." He glanced at his watch, beckoned the waiter, repeated the order. "As far back as mind serves—I was born in New York—I've never caused any trouble in this city. Yet I'm of interest. Or is it for my protection?"

"You need protection?"

"My room was searched today. Is that part of the service?"

The detective grunted, "I don't know about that." He didn't; surprise had quickened his face.

"I didn't think you did. It wouldn't surprise me if we were both being followed, Mr. Cassidy."

"Who'd be doing that?" the detective scowled.

Piers stabbed out lightly. "There might be others interested in Secretary Anstruther's whereabouts."

Cassidy pulled himself up in the chair. The mask was pushed from his face. Behind it was revealed a man of brain, a hunter of strength, stubbornness.

"You're wasting your time." Piers matched the coldness. "I do not know where the Secretary"—he recalled caution—"is in retirement."

Cassidy belched. "I'm not looking for the Secretary. I'm looking for a briefcase." He began to laugh, choking with it.

Piers echoed, "A briefcase." Bewilderment must have shown in his face for Cassidy wheezed until a globule fell from each eye.

But there wasn't a briefcase. He'd invented it for Captain Devlin. It didn't add up. To recover a briefcase Devlin wouldn't set a watch on the man who lost it. The answer must lie in Johann Schmidt. He frowned. "Whose briefcase?"

"The briefcase of Secretary Anstruther. It's about so big." The gnarled hands moved. "Made out of alligator. Real alligator."

Piers realized with a rush of fury the betrayal of the subconscious. He had described Anstruther's dispatch case to Devlin. It was too late to retract description. More than ever now he wanted to learn who had set the detective on his trail. How to ask he didn't know. He parried, "Do you mean the Secretary has lost his case?"

Cassidy drained the glass.

"And do you mean to say," he gathered momentum, "Secretary Anstruther told you to follow me?"

"Who says I'm following you?"

Piers said flatly, "I don't believe it." He forced it upon the hulk of man. "I've worked with Secretary Anstruther for years. If he'd lost something and thought I might know where it was, he'd ask me. Who set you on me?"

"The boss."

"The Commissioner of Police?" He was

the boss, Devlin had said it. And he was averse to murder. Johann Schmidt was a part of the answer. He paid the check. "I'm going to dinner now, the theater later. I don't imagine it will do any good to tell you I have no briefcase, neither of my own nor of Secretary Anstruther."

"Don't worry about me none." Cassidy wiped his mouth. "I'm obliged for the beer."

2.

IN BROADWAY at night, glittering and noisy, he moved with the crowd as far as Lindy's, waited for a booth. No one here was concerned about the future of peace. They had peace. He ordered a steak dinner. Dining alone was dining quickly. He would reach the musical before its late curtain. There would be standing room; that was important, to get inside the theater.

When he came out of the restaurant he saw Cassidy on the corner. He would follow until he was led to what the boss, or someone behind the boss, wanted.

Piers knew this theater, knew the second floor exit to a catwalk leading to the producer's office. The producer clung to the wings whenever he had a leg show. Piers bought a standing room ticket and glanced back at the sidewalk. Cassidy was there.

The house lights were darkening as he entered. There were the last moments of confusion of seating. Piers moved on up the red-carpeted stairs to the balcony lounge, went to the water fountain for excuse and waited there while the orchestra leaped into rhythmic frenzy. There were others who came up the steps but none lingered, none noticed him. It was possible that Cassidy would not come into the theater.

It was even possible that Cassidy would take time to feed himself, the big man must be hungry by now. Not that Piers believed that Cassidy would in so doing leave the way clear for Piers to slip away unencumbered into the night. There would be someone watching the exits, a policeman on the beat,

a theater doorman. Meantime, what of the watcher who was watching both Cassidy and Piers? Perhaps he too was hungry and did not fear losing his quarry as long as Cassidy was in clear view.

Despite the risk of drawing the attention of an usher it seemed advisable to move before Cassidy's weary shoes dogged after him. He wasn't actually worried about getting past the usher. It was the later questions that would be asked concerning him by Cassidy, by an unknown man in the dark.

By the time of questioning he should be well away. Cassidy had definitely stated he didn't care if Piers did escape him. Escape him he would. He walked then without haste to the left of the house. The usher stood at the head of the aisle, her eyes on stage. Piers murmured, "Leo's office." His father had been one of Leo's first stars. He continued without haste to the door, opened it a slip and stood outside on the narrow passageway, high above the dark alley below. He moved quickly now, listening for the crank of the door opening behind him, but it was silent.

The producer's door knob turned under his hand. It was the same grubby little office, unchanged in twenty years. He took a breath before he opened the door into the small anteroom. It was empty.

Luck had been with him. He opened this door a wedge, slid through. One dim bulb lighted the landing. He remembered three flights to the alley exit. In the death silence the iron steps reverberated to his careful descent. Only if he removed his shoes could he muffle the sound. That chance he couldn't take. It would hinder progress if he had to cut and run.

Cursing breathlessly he wound down the staircase until he stood in the almost complete darkness of the alley level. There was no sound from above. Yet he hesitated before opening that door, fearing not Cassidy but another man who might stand outside. He didn't want to die. His hand was actually clammy when he touched the knob.

[Turn page]

SEEING-BELIEVING

THIRST-RELIEVING

What happens when you look at the circles
and move your head from side to side?



ANSWER. The circles spin like a wheel.



He looked out into an empty lane. His walk was swift to the end of the alley. Before stepping from its narrow confines, he peered out. No one was waiting for him. It was a cheap street. This end of the block was deserted.

Piers left the alley in one stride and moved towards Eighth Avenue. He had no intention of walking into Cassidy's grasping hands again. He walked Eighth to 54th street. By that time he was certain he had escaped all trackers. For the remainder of the evening he was free to do as he should choose.

HE HAD had no plan in mind when he planned escape, nothing more than the throwing off of surveillance. But now that he was out of the box he knew what he would attempt to do. He walked across town to Broadway again. He had no hesitation in hailing a cab here in the Fifties. The men who were watching him could scarcely cover a town with as many cruisers as Manhattan.

"Grand Central," he said. "Lexington entrance."

He lighted a cigarette. If he had any lingering doubts of being free he would erase them in these final maneuvers. He paid off the driver and entered the station. He followed arrows across the station to the Biltmore exit. He went through the hotel and made his way to Park. The avenue lay wide and quiet save for the endless stream of traffic. He walked to the great white shaft of the International Building.

It was possible that there would be someone in the office after ten. The imminent Conclave meant an inordinate amount of work. If there was someone there he could ask for information of little importance.

The guard was a stocky man with suspicion gritted into his mouth. Piers stated, "I'm Thompson. Peace office." The night guard couldn't possibly know all employees of the Peace office even by name. "Mr. Gordon sent me over for some reports he needs." He edged the door as he spoke.

The guard was less suspicious at mention of the office and at the magic name of Gordon.

"If you'll take me up," Piers suggested, "I have the key."

"You got to sign the register."

"Where is it?"

"Over here." The ledger was on the elevator stool.

Piers signed illegibly, walked into the elevator.

"Plenty of work with that meeting coming up, I betcha," the guard volunteered.

"Plenty," Piers responded. "Anyone else here?"

"No. But some of the girls didn't get away till after I come on."

Piers said, "Well, the International Con-

clave only meets once in two years. That's not too tough."

The man stopped at the 19th floor. "I hope they'll tell them Germans where to head in. Imagine them wanting the International Army moved out of their country."

"You're against it?"

"You just bet I'm against it. Do you know why they want it? It's so they can start another war. All the excuses they can think up—my kid could see through them. Expense for the United Nations—what do they care? And that one about their pride being hurt! Ain't that too bad? After what they done in the Last War." He shook his head.

"You were in it?"

"Three years. I know what war's like."

"I had four years of it."

"You know." The man's eyes met his. "I can't see these big shots arguing we ought to withdraw the army. I can't see it."

Piers said, "I wish you were a delegate."

"I'd tell them."

"Yes." His thoughts were long. He shook out of it. "I'd better find those reports."

"Yeah. Gimme a ring when you want out." The elevator door slid silently shut.

He was alone on the 19th floor, alone in shadows flung by the night light. His steps on the marble corridor echoed as he approached the door. The key should admit him to both the private offices. It was Anstruther's key. It turned and he knew there was no one here; the room had the smell of emptiness. But it was entirely possible that there would be watchers to report an unexpected light in the Peace office at this hour. And there was always the coincidental approach of Gordon in his mind.

GORDON'S door was lettered, not locked.

He left it in darkness until he had closed the Venetian blinds, then turned on the desk lamp. The desk itself was locked; the files were open. He pulled the drawer E. Standing there, he read the Evanhurst correspondence, rapidly, photographically. There was no doubt that Evanhurst was committed to the policy of releasing Germany from supervision. There was little doubt that Gordon concurred.

He went quickly to B. Brecklein. There the same arguments Anstruther had voiced, that the guard had stated. Withdraw—save expense to the United Nations. Withdraw—we have proved ourselves peaceful in these twelve years. Why humiliate us longer? Withdraw—we can become self-supporting, valuable in trade channels if we are allowed freedom of production again.

Anstruther had hinted this. Why force Germany to ship out her metals when her factories could so easily manufacture at home? The guard downstairs had said it. "Even my kid could see through it." But the

kid wouldn't be blinded by personal ambition, by worship of the ape, by wish fathering the thought.

He should leave now; he'd found out enough to know where Gordon stood. But he went rapidly to the Schern file. Little here. The silent partner. He turned from the files. And then he forced himself to return to them, to open the file on von Eynar.

Surprisingly enough, what he had wanted was here. The border incidents. There was no doubt about Germany's part in them. For a moment he doubted the letters as genuine. But he realized, in themselves they were nothing. It was only by adding them to his own information that their treachery was fact.

He took the three most damning. It meant time, and the sweat stood cold on his flesh while he sat at the typewriter and copied the three. He traced a signature, Hugo von E. It would pass casual inspection. He put the copies into the file.

The originals he put into his inner pocket. He turned off the lamp, opened the blinds, stood again in the shadowy hall. No one could come in without the guard admitting him, but anyone could give a fictitious name and reason for entry. His hair crawled while he waited for the whine to rise. Even when it ceased at the floor he was taut until he saw the same guard who had brought him up.

"All finished?"

"Thanks, yes." His forehead was damp. "Took me a little time but it's all right now."

"I had a bit of trouble myself," the man said. "Isn't often you get it. Not much excitement in this racket."

Piers controlled his voice. "What sort of trouble?"

"Fellow tried to push in to meet a Beers Hund. Kept telling me this Hund was waiting for him."

"Didn't get in on that one, did he?"

"You bet not." The car jolted to a stop. "I said there's nobody here. And when he tried to talk back I just put my hand on his chest and pushed." He scowled. "Talked like a Hun. If he comes around again I'll call the cops."

"Did he leave—after you pushed him?"

"Not right away. Guess he's gone by now."

He wasn't. Piers knew that. He was waiting somewhere outside. To follow again? If that was all he wanted he'd have been content to wait outside. This was more of the real thing.

Piers couldn't show his own hand to the guard. Gordon must not know of this visit. He had to play it quickly; he couldn't delay here with the presumptive reports for Gordon in his pocket. He bit his lip. "I wonder." He was confidential. "These reports are important to the Conclave. I wonder if that man could be a German who

doesn't want me to carry them to Mr. Gordon."

The guard's black eyes clicked.

"He must have seen me come in. Germany doesn't intend to be turned down this time. She wishes to eliminate all chance of failure. I must get out without that man knowing it."

"We better call the cops."

"No." Piers spoke sharply. "That would mean publicity. It would give Germany a hold over us. By the time we finished apologizing for having one of their men arrested, we'd be promising them withdrawal."

The guard growled, "Diplomats are too lily-livered."

"We must preserve peace," Piers said. No matter what you'd like to do to those who threatened it.

"Then how you going to get out?" the guard asked.

"I don't know." He could call Cassidy but Cassidy mustn't be allowed to report that he'd visited the Peace office. He asked. "Is there a phone?"

"Yeah."

"I'd better phone for a cab."

"You'd get one quicker standing outside." He shook his cap. "You can't do that though. If he's out there."

"I'll have to chance making it from the door."

THE guard spoke with regret. "My brother-in-law drives for Yellow. But he's cruising Broadway this time of night." He shook his head. "I know a checker at Yellow. I'll call his stand for you."

"Thanks awfully." He followed the guard to the switchboard. It was in sight of the glass doors. His neck crawled.

"Harry? This is Nick. I want a cab. Tell the driver to keep the engine running and be ready to step on it. No—nothing wrong. Yeah, it's an emergency run . . . How's Thelma? . . . Yeah, she's fine. Be seeing you." He disconnected the service, said to Piers, "I can't leave the building but I'll keep my eyes sharp till you get away."

Piers said, "I'm grateful to you, Mr. . . ."

"Nick Pulaski."

They moved to the doors now, standing there silent, watching the muted flow of traffic. The sound of the tires was muffled here.

The guard said, "It'll take a little time."

"It doesn't matter."

"Say, I never thought," the guard said. "We could have called Mr. Gordon."

"It didn't occur to me either," Piers said. He folded a bill and held it out. "Buy yourself a cigar."

"I don't want pay to take care of a German."

"It isn't pay." He urged it on the man. "Buy the kids a treat. There are kids?"

"Three boys." He took the bill. "I don't

ever want them to see what I saw. Bombs dropping on little kids—"

"I saw it too. We mustn't let it happen again."

"We won't let it happen again." The man spoke violently. "No matter what the big shots do."

The taxi was pulling to the door.

"I'll get the guy myself," the guard avowed. He unlocked the door.

Piers ran for the cab. It couldn't take more than seconds to reach the open cab door. But from the darkness against the building a squat figure also chugged towards the waiting taxi.

"Mine cab," the man grunted.

"Sorry." Piers pushed. His hand was on the door. He said to the driver, "Nick Pulaski called Harry."

The driver's ugly face said, "You're the one."

The squat man stood in the way. "Beers Hund—"

"Get out of my way." Piers shoved the man off balance. He slammed the door as he stepped in, urged, "Go on, driver."

The squat man was standing there, impotent.

"Where to?" the driver asked.

"Just get out of sight. I'll give you directions."

"Trouble?"

"There could be." He felt in his pocket. The letters were there. But the enemy couldn't know he had them. It was something else they wanted. Piers didn't dare drive directly to the hotel. The squat man had doubtless memorized the license number. He rode in silence as far as 34th street. He spoke then, "I want to go to Grand Central."

"We already passed it."

"I wanted to be certain we'd lose that man."

"Who is he?"

"I don't know." He'd never seen the moon face before. "I'm carrying important papers. I'm with the Peace Department. How do you feel about peace?"

The brows scowled. "If they take the army out of Germany we'll have war again in ten years. You can't trust them Dutchies. They're as bad as the Japs. You don't see China letting Japan get any ideas?"

Piers shook his head. "They are wise enough to be forceful for the preservation of peace."

If Germany could have been eliminated entirely as a political unit as Japan had been. But there was only one strong voice in Eastern Asia. China. In Europe there were too many.

They were approaching 42nd now. "Any door?" the driver asked.

Piers said, "I've changed my mind. I'll get off on Broadway. Lindy's." The fat

man might be watching Grand Central. Broadway would be at its brightest, theaters opening their doors, taxis clustered, the police standing tall at every intersection.

He paid off the driver at the restaurant. "Hope you don't have no more trouble," the man said. He purred away.

Piers swung into the down stream towards the Astor. He was only mildly surprised to see Cassidy leaning against the newsstand.

Cassidy asked, "Where you been?"

"To the theater." Piers gathered the early morning papers.

"You give me the slip," the detective said.

Piers grinned at him.

"If there's been any murders tonight, you'll be hauled in."

"I'll produce an alibi," Piers assured him. "I'm going to bed. Don't you ever sleep?"

"It's nothing but a habit," Cassidy proclaimed.

"I'm not going out again," Piers told him.

"You'd better turn in. Good night." He went to the elevators, up to fifth, walked the few paces to his door, set the key. He opened his room, closed the door after him.

"Do not make a light." The voice from the shadow was deep and it was cold. "What you see in my hand is a gun."

IV

THE shadow was gigantic. The blinking sign across Broadway lighted again and Piers could see the man. He said softly, tentatively, "Fabian?"

"I am David. I am from Fabian." He wasn't giant. He was small and quiet and black as the night. "It is better we speak without lighting the room."

"Yes." Piers flung the papers on the bed freeing his hands. But he had no intention of moving against a man with a gun. "Won't you sit down?"

"No."

"May I? I'm tired."

"As you will. But where you are please?"

Piers sat on the bed. Weariness crept over him, bone weariness. "You might as well put down the gun," he said. "I'm not armed."

David said, "I could take no chance of not obtaining what I came for." He didn't put away the gun. It was like a toy in the black hand.

"How did you get into my room?" Piers asked.

"Through a ruse," David said.

"And you knew I was stopping here?"

"You have been followed."

"Yes." He began to laugh, weakly, silently. "Yours are better. I didn't know about yours." Africans from the bush would track a man and he would never know. "What

do you want?" Piers asked suddenly.

"Secretary Anstruther's dispatch case."

"Why not go to him?"

"Anstruther is dead." He was like a statue of carved ebony. Piers could see his eyes, dark and fathomless. "He died on the Nubian desert. He and the unknown."

Piers remembered then. Fabian was of Nubian stock. It accounted for a drum beating a message from ancient Nubia to modern Equatorial Africa.

Piers spoke out in dull anger. "Fabian sent him to his death."

"Fabian?" There incredulous surprise, in the question.

"Fabian wired asking him to come at once to the Lake of the Crocodiles."

"Fabian sent no wire," the dark man stated.

"I saw it."

"This wire—what did it say?"

"It said that Fabian wished to see him. Anstruther would do anything for Fabian. He left at once."

"Fabian was in Tibet. He could send no wire from the Lake of the Crocodiles. Show me the wire."

"I haven't it. Fabian's name signed it."

"Fabian sent no wire," he repeated steadily.

Piers rose. The gun moved to cover him. "I want to talk with Fabian. I don't know why he sent it. He hadn't answered my request for an audience; he hadn't reported the incidents to the Commission."

"He preferred to handle the incidents himself. They were not important unless made so. Someone made use of his name. The plan was successful. Anstruther is dead. Why else was there a wire—if there was a wire—" His look was steady on Piers. "You have the dispatch case. You were seen with it in Alexandria. In it are the Secretary's final decisions for this conference. It was on these he worked in Alexandria. We wish to see them before the conference opens."

PIERS breathed deeply. He knew now what he had actually known since last night. It was the Anstruther memoranda. "Secretary Anstruther carried his dispatch case on the flight. I may have been seen with my own, a similar one."

"Show me the similar one."

"I can't. I lost it. Last night."

The man's smile was ironic.

"I lost it on Broadway last night. There was an accident in front of the Paramount. A man named Johann Schmidt was struck by a taxicab. In the hubbub my case disappeared. I reported it to the police today." He lifted his voice. "You can use that gun on me if you choose but I can't show you either Anstruther's dispatch case or my own. I have neither."

David put the gun into his pocket. "I did

not come here to kill you. I came to see certain papers."

"You can search my room," Piers said.

"It has been searched."

"Search me if you like." He remembered only then the letters he had taken.

"You could not carry that many papers on you. No." The head moved. "If you refuse now, we will wait. You will eventually lead us to where they are."

Pier's mouth thinned. He wouldn't lead Fabian to the papers. He had been forewarned.

He asked, "You're going?"

"Yes. There is nothing more I can do tonight." The telegram had muted the lion's roar. For tonight.

"Before you go— How will Fabian vote?"

David's voice was soft. "Only Fabian knows that."

Piers put out his hand. He pleaded, "If Anstruther is dead, if you know this—" He didn't know how to say it. "Have you informed Gordon? The President?"

The eyes lidded. "We have told no one. We are wiser than that, Mr. Hunt."

"Let me talk to Fabian. You can arrange it." His voice was on its knees.

"With the Anstruther papers?"

If he dared, but he didn't. Not until he knew where Fabian stood. He said, "I don't have them. If I could talk with Fabian—"

"It is impossible."

Piers watched helpless as the man, soft-footed, jungle-footed, went away.

The black man had come with a weapon of death in his hand. Yet Fabian was a man of peace. He must be that or the world tottered. Was there no way to insure peace among nations save at the point of a gun? A nation was men, many men, the minds and hands and spirits of many men. Couldn't man, all men, want peace enough that peace would be?

It was too soon for despair. Incredible as it seemed there had been no Secretary of Peace in any national cabinet until after the Last War. Always a Secretary of War, and a Secretary of the Army and the Navy, but no voice for peace until twelve years ago.

Too soon to get discouraged, even if he were being hunted through the streets of New York, even if Anstruther lay dead in Africa, even if Fabian, his hope, had sent a man with a gun in his hand. Peace must not be threatened. He would fight for its preservation without Fabian if that was how it must be. But his heart was sick within him. He knew how small he was, one infinitesimal man fighting alone.

A UNIFORMED attendant took Gordon's tall silk hat, his white gloves, his ebony stick. Gordon didn't need to touch his white tie but he regarded its perfection

and his handsome face, his glossy hair in the mirror. Piers was faded, reflected in the glass dimly, from afar.

Gordon said, "Don't worry about not dressing. I'll say you've only come over." His faint disdain touched Piers' grays.

Piers didn't care. Unreasonably he hadn't thought white tie or black when he dressed tonight. More tumultuous affairs had occupied his mind. Gordon would never have been that engrossed.

The manservant announced them softly at the door of the parlors. His voice couldn't have carried across the room but Evanhurst turned and loped forward. Piers knew the face, hammered leanly of aristocratic coin; he knew the tall form, aged to emaciation, the mustache, white now, which sheltered an unknown mouth. Piers stood behind Gordon, but it was he to whom Evanhurst extended his first hand.

"Piers. Piers Hunt. I'm delighted, my boy. What more can I say?" His left hand reached for Gordon. "Witt, you're looking splendid, of course. Always splendid. And how good of you to find Piers." He was an old man, Anstruther's generation. His eyes had faded, what once had been blue pigment was almost colorless.

But he wasn't tired, as Anstruther had been tired. He put a narrow hand under the arm of Piers on his right, of Gordon on his left. "It will make our evening more important. I've known Piers a long time, Witt, did he tell you? Since he was a small boy. In this very room."

Gordon thrust his head at Piers.

Piers said in explanation. "This was my grandmother's apartment. I was brought up here."

Then the room had been somberly beautiful, dark oiled furniture, heavy raspberry brocades looped back from the windows. Now, white and gold it was the Plaza's royal suite. It had been their royal suite when Cornelia Piers reigned here. Gordon didn't know. Piers' lack of dress wouldn't bother him now.

Lord Evanhurst shook his head. "She was a wonderful woman, Piers; I remember her in London when she was young."

He had led them across the room and the heavy man with the heavy porcine face rose from his white chair. He took the scented black cigar from his lips. He thrust a manicured ham at Gordon. "Good evening, Witt," he said. "How did you come out at the races today?" There was little accent.

"Rather nicely," Gordon responded. They were men of good humor, evenly met.

"You know Ernst Brecklein, I believe?" Evanhurst asked.

"I don't," Piers said.

Evanhurst tapped Brecklein's arm. "Ernst, you don't know Piers Hunt?"

The big head turned slowly. There was

surprise in his narrowed eyes. And then the smile cut through but the eyes weren't smiling, they were appraising this slight, unimportant-looking man in the gray suit. "I have not had the pleasure," he bowed.

"You know of each other certainly," Evanhurst pattered. "Mr. Brecklein, Mr. Hunt. Piers is an old, old friend of mine. I knew his grandmother well. Mr. Brecklein is acting as Germany's chief envoy to our present Conclave, Piers." He waved a fine hand to the small man who had slid beside Brecklein, who was now shaking hands with Gordon. A man who when he was young might have been brother to Johann Schmidt. He was dried out now, all but the wolf lift of his lips from his teeth.

"Schern, you know Piers Hunt?" Evanhurst insisted. "No? An old friend of mine." Piers bowed. "I knew him when . . ."

The pointed tails, the richness of smoke and drink, the gloss of the host couldn't take away the smell of blood and burning. In his grandmother's parlors.

THE girl on the terrace beyond, the girl with the pale gold hair cupped over her shoulders and the pale gold silk molding her young body was Bianca Anstruther. Her face was lifted to Hugo von Eynar. He said without disturbance, "There is someone I know," even as Gordon, tired of Piers and his grandmother, cried, "There's Bibi. I didn't know she was coming."

Evanhurst cackled, "She dropped in. I believe she has a message for you." He lowered his lip. "Hasn't Anstruther come out of hiding yet?"

Piers followed Gordon's extrication to the terrace. Gordon was holding Bibi's hand, reprimanding her. "Why didn't you tell me you were coming here?"

Piers said, "Hello, Hugo."

Hugo von Eynar's yellow eyes were insolent. "Hello, Piers. I scarcely expected to see you here."

"I scarcely expected to be here."

The rope of hostility was stretched tight as it had been in the past, as it always was to be.

Gordon said, "You haven't met Bibi, Piers. Bianca Anstruther, Piers Hunt. Our Secretary's daughter, you know. And my fiancée."

"I used to wrap dolls to send her from Switzerland." Gordon's fiancée. Another knot tied in success.

"You met last night," Hugo stated.

"No. I picked up Mr. Hunt, Hugo."

Hugo shrugged. Gordon frowned at her. She continued, "Of course I've known of him since I was a child. As he says, he used to wrap the dolls my father collected for me all over Europe."

Gordon remarked as if he couldn't forget it, "This once was Hunt's grandmother's apartment."

"It wasn't this splendid," Piers said. "It was old-fashioned." He broke off, turning to Hugo. "What brings you to New York at this time?"

"I am the ambassadorial representative to the Conclave."

Piers eyed him steadily. "The expert on the border incidents perhaps?"

"You seem to know. Perhaps you also know that our friends blame you for not keeping the peace in Africa. That too will be brought before the Conclave."

Piers shook himself out of thought. "There is peace in Africa, Hugo. You surely don't think the border incidents are important, do you?"

Gordon turned his head as if he hadn't heard aright. "But they are important, Piers. A threat—"

Piers laughed. "I've just come from there, old man. Fabian hasn't even appealed to the Peace Commission for investigation."

"But you told me, he wired Anstruther—"

Piers laughed again. "I talked with one of Fabian's leaders last night. Fabian didn't send the wire; he was in Tibet at the time. Evidently some undersecretary—" The laughter froze on his face. "Or some interested party who wants trouble there."

Piers stood, relishing their enforced silence. Gordon could not ask questions, not and guard the secret of state. Von Eynar couldn't admit his prescience of the Fabian wire. Bianca was silent too, her hands clenched against the folds of her golden dress. Her eyes turned suddenly on Piers; it was too sudden for him to hide the triumph which was flowing through him. He couldn't explain, not here and not yet.

Piers said, "Perhaps we should join the others?"

He walked away and Hugo spoke behind him. "Perhaps you don't know that we visited Africa this year. Fabian was kind enough to invite us."

Piers didn't turn but the words had smote him as they were meant. That long ago the seed had been sown? Fabian in connivance with the Germans, with Brecklein's beefy assurance, Schern's guile? An understanding between Germany and the races of color?

IT WAS impossible that Fabian would be party to such a deal. Not Fabian, who was developing one of the great modern states out of primitive tribes. Not Fabian, who had dreamed this native African state as important, as democratic, as modern as that of any white nation, who had in twelve years made giant strides towards its fulfillment. It was anathema to that for which the name Fabian stood.

Anstruther had believed in Fabian above all of the peace leaders. It was this belief which had hastened him to the Lake of the Crocodiles following the wire from Fabian.

To his death.

Piers stepped into the lighted drawing room. The three followed from the terrace quickly now as if they feared to allow him to move alone. None of the Germans had expected his presence tonight; none wanted it. That was more of their superb espionage. They knew a man threatened even before he expressed his threat.

Evanhurst was greeting newcomers in the archway. Dessaye and Mancianargo. The dainty Frenchman, a shell, filled and emptied at Evanhurst's wish. Mancianargo, the bent Italian peasant, somber-faced, his gnarled wrists protruding from his sleeves.

Schern said, "Poor André! Shows his age badly."

Brecklein's scorn grittled. "Who is the Italian?"

Piers answered him. "Mancianargo was Anstruther's choice. He believes in peace."

"Who doesn't?" Schern asked insolently. "We in Germany above all hold to peace."

"I believed that Anstruther would be here tonight," Brecklein said.

Gordon answered, "The Secretary was unable to make it. He seldom attends social functions."

Evanhurst, birdlike in his age, was propelling the newcomers forward. He said, "I hoped Bibi would join us in her father's stead. But she has more lively matters to attend, yes, dear?"

"I must run along. Until later?" She divided the question between Gordon and Hugo but it was to the German her eyes turned adulation.

Pier's mouth tightened. Hugo should not be allowed to corrupt Anstruther's young daughter. She moved to the door, lifted her hand in farewell.

Lord Evanhurst spoke with ancient courtesy. "Shall we repair to the dining room, gentlemen?"

The tapers, the heavy linen cloth, the bowl of white roses laid nostalgia on the table. The secret currents seasoning the fine food, hatred and malice and wile. This wasn't a table of peace. Not even when Evanhurst proposed the customary toast, "Peace be among you," was the devil's laughter silenced. There was no one here, save perhaps Mancianargo, who would fight for peace. And Italy no less than France was dependent on Evanhurst.

"I too propose a toast," Brecklein said. "To Secretary Anstruther."

Piers' hand clenched the wine stem. He lifted the glass but he didn't taste. It was his laugh that broke the separate thought and knowledge seething in the silence. "It seems incredible that nations once planned for war as we plan for peace. Unbelievable that there once was a man named Hitler."

"He was quite mad," Evanhurst nodded.

Schern agreed thinly, "A strange genius."

But then aren't all geniuses mad?"

Von Eynar said, "He put up a good show while it lasted."

"You knew him?" Gordon asked.

"Slightly, I'm afraid. I spoke with him only twice."

Piers stated, "Schern knew him well, Gordon. He headed the Berlin secret service."

Schern's voice was colorless. "There were things necessary in wartime. As you know." He inclined his head towards Gordon. "You evidently are alone here in fortune to know nothing of such things."

"I served with Darlan," Dessaye boasted.

"Piers, too, was in Berlin," Hugo smiled.

Mancianargo hadn't understood much. Perhaps the name of the war-crazed leader of the Germans, Hitler the Destroyer, awakened him. He said now, "There must be no war."

EVANHURST spoke to him gently in Italian. He repeated to the others in English. "It is the New World. We go forward with peace to security and prosperity."

Brecklein beamed and Schern relaxed. Gordon and Hugo nodded, well pleased. Piers alone sat sick in heart. Evanhurst was won to trust of Germany at the cost of threatening war again. Something must be done. The blind must be made to see. He was as silent as the Italian peasant while the others moved gambits of conversation through the dessert and liqueurs.

They returned to the gold and white room. He listened until he was stifled with the politeness, the commonplaces, the intrigue. Without apology he moved again to the terrace hung above the glade of Central Park. A wave of remembered beauty engulfed him. He had known true peace the first time he stood here. He heard the step and he swung about expecting von Eynar. Gordon stood there. Gordon asked, "Why did you refuse the toast to Anstruther?"

"You expected me to drink?"

Gordon spoke out to the night. "Is he dead?"

Piers didn't answer until he pressed behind the man's shoulder. "I wouldn't say that aloud here."

"Is he?"

Hard anger thrust Piers. "That's what they want to know behind the smokescreen of their fat cigars and their platitudes of prosperity and peace."

"You're referring to Brecklein's commission?"

"To the Germans, yes."

"You're mistaken, Piers." Gordon was reasonable. "Germany wants only the freedom of the just."

"You've listened to the siren song. Who sang it, Brecklein, or Hugo? It doesn't matter who. The composer was Schern."

"You're wrong, Piers. You're obsessed

with the single idea. Your insinuation to Hugo on the African business showed that. You don't recognize the aspirations of the new Germany."

"I take it you are for withdrawal then."

"Definitely. I am for a great expanding world."

"And our Secretary?"

The doubt came into Gordon's eyes. "I don't know for certain. He went to Europe to see for himself before deciding."

Piers stated flatly, coldly, drawing the sword without fear, "I am for the letter of the protectorate. I believe that Germany must remain a dependency for the prescribed fifty years." He couldn't hope to convince Gordon in these few days against the long-studied blandishments of the Germans. He could only have faith that his truth would be conviction. But before the words faded, he turned and saw Hugo motionless in the doorway. Gordon called, "Come on out. We're catching a breath of air."

Hugo moved forward, his hatred of Piers covered by his grace. Gordon must not know what lay behind the masque. Hugo's lips smiled. "Gordon, we're awaited in the Persian Room. Bibi rang up."

Gordon laughed. He suggested, "Join us, Piers." Not wanting it; it was as required courtesy.

Piers refused. He'd had a bellyful for this night. He followed the others into the drawing room; Brecklein and Evanhurst were talking.

Hugo said, "Will you forgive us, Evanhurst, if we join the ladies below for a bit of music?"

Evanhurst was quick on his cranelike legs. "Certainly, certainly, my boy. Not much amusement here for young blood." He splattered his old-fashioned politeness on each of them. Piers might as well take his departure while it was offered. It would not be wisdom to remain here. He couldn't for long without speaking out and it wasn't time yet for that. There would be no chance for him to inherit Anstruther's place in the session if this aggregate of representatives was massed against him.

Evanhurst patted his shoulder. "I want to see you soon, Piers. How about lunch tomorrow? No, that's tied up—"

"Make it breakfast," Piers suggested. He watched Hugo and Gordon arm in arm pass through the arch. "I'm stopping here. You can ring me when you're about."

"Breakfast. Capital. Nine-thirty. No need to call."

He wondered about the detective who must have followed him this day. Cassidy was on his twenty-four-hour leave. There'd been little work for the man. He'd remained in his room until time to join Gordon at the Waldorf. Would the new man be in the corridor outside or waiting below?

He'd have a long wait. Piers had the key for his room with him. In the room were the necessary items Abercrombie had delivered.

"Breakfast then," he said. "Here?"

"You wouldn't like to stay on a bit if you aren't dancing? Brecklein's giving us some figures on Germany's progress. Gad, what they've accomplished!"

Evanhurst was committed. The international protectorate was a barrier to expanding trade. Hope of opening his eyes was dim. "Rather not," Piers said. "I'm not official. Watkins in town?"

"Washington." Evanhurst tittered. "Handling the heavy work." He didn't care much for Watkins, a plodder, without rank. "Breakfast then."

Piers said, "Good night, sir." To the others he spoke a general farewell. A frieze of faces, expressionless, not wise enough to realize that it was not Piers who was in danger; it was they and for what they stood.

3

H E HADN'T lost his nerve. It had been unshaken by Johann Schmidt; it remained steady after the encounter with the fat-faced Uncle Schmidt last night. Facing Schern with the corpselike hands, watching Brecklein's cruel mouth tighten at him didn't disturb him. He knew as well that he alone had both the means and the will to thwart their plans. And because they sensed this, they would have no ethical hesitation about murdering him. The end justified the means in furthering German interests.

Basically it was that belief which had started the Last War. A variation of the same, were they successful, would precipitate the world into the throes of death. The refined details of mass destruction had improved in twelve years, and in the Last War extermination had been plausible if not effected. Germany must be held supine until her warrior breed had been eradicated by age.

The corridor below was empty of shadows. He turned the key and opened the door. The room was strange. With the light on, he examined the clothes closet, the bathrobe, bed slippers. In the bureau drawers were the pajamas and other essentials. He opened the window wide. There was no bright spectacle of Broadway outside, only the dark distances of the park.

He flung himself down on the bed. They were determined. They were so damn clever. The way they'd instigated these border squabbles. An incident could be integral, but a series of incidents spotted laterally across the border of South and Equatorial Africa was not. And their dirty hands were covered. But with those letters, he had the proof. It must be presented to the Conclave.

Fabian could know the truth. If David had

but come as friend, Piers could have given him the letters last night. But he dared not mention them. David would have taken the letters by force had he known; they could disappear to suit the aims of the powers. Even as Anstruther's final memoranda would disappear if it could be found.

The fear was in him anew that the Germans had reached Fabian; only they could have set him after the dispatch case. Clever, cold, ruthless. Three men. One the smart business man, one the sly diplomat, one the social ornament. A man for each man at the conference. For all but one man, the man of peace.

And Anstruther was dead.

Piers wasn't clever; he wasn't versed in wile. Fight cleverness with violence. Yes. Fight with the men of peace. Where were those men? A night watchman, a taxi driver, Piers. He was without power. This was Gordon's territory. Anstruther could not speak again for him.

Anstruther's living voice was never to be stilled. Piers would see that Anstruther spoke from the grave.

The telephone jarred him. He lifted it and held it for a long moment to his ear before he spoke.

Gordon's warm voice came over the wire. "Why don't you join us? Everyone's asking for you."

"I'm certain Bianca is," he said dryly.

Gordon was soothing. "She's just a child, Piers. And she's wrought up. He always kept in touch with her, a cable every Sunday when he was away. When it didn't come last week, she began brooding."

"She blames me."

"Because you saw him off. I shouldn't have told her that, I suppose," he apologized quickly. "I thought you could tell her he wasn't in any danger."

Piers interrupted. "Do you have his papers?"

"Good God, Piers, are you drunk?"

"I just wondered," Piers said. "There are a good many who seem to think I have them." He broke off. "I don't want to join your party but when you can make an excuse, come up."

There was hesitation. Bianca was Gordon's fiancée but she worshipped Hugo. Gordon couldn't clear out. And he, Piers, was a witless one to believe that further discussion with Gordon might be of value. "If it's possible, I'll be up."

P IERS replaced the phone. He ran his hand through his hair. There could be no harm in letting Gordon know some of what had happened since his arrival. He might yet have to call on the Peace offices for protection. Even if that were not necessary, the enemy could know that he was not blind to their attentions. Exposure could

not dissipate these, it could force a change of means and in so doing deflect the aim.

He hung his jacket over the back of a chair, pulled off his tie and shirt. He wouldn't take any chance on Gordon persuading him to come downstairs. He told himself it was that he didn't want to face Bianca's hostility again tonight but he knew the truth. He couldn't stomach Hugo's smile.

The knock sounded on the door and he swung it open. He stood there, his hand tightening on the knob, not moving.

He said bitterly, "I've been expecting you."

She was fair as remembered. The veins in him ran warm as wine even as his hatred of this warmth clenched his guts. Her good height, her fine long bones, her heart face and the smooth cap of ochre hair, her eyes blue as a child's wise as those of a witch. She looked clear and honest and sharp. Honesty had no place in her. She had been learned in the use of every inch of her loveliness when first he knew her. The years had enriched her wisdom.

She said, "And I thought I would surprise you, Piers." Her voice was deliberate a part of her as the golden lashes she lifted.

He was wooden watching her, remembering her and hating the betrayal of his memory. She kept her eyes on him until he jerked the door shut.

She said, "You wouldn't come to me."

He said again, "I expected you. When I saw Hugo, when I knew Schern was here." His mouth twisted. "You're still his . . ."

"I am Frau General Brecklein."

He murmured, "Congratulations," and he said, "You forget that military titles are no longer in vogue, Morgen." His frown narrowed. "Or has Germany adopted them in advance of a Conclave decision?"

There was anger, a flush in her throat. "I do not know what you are talking about."

"Don't you?" He dared not rest on the edge of the bed lest remembrance overpower his senses. "Which one sent you to me?"

"Sent me?" There was a quiescence about her, her hands motionless on the fragile white lace of her skirt. "No one sent me, Piers."

"Why did you want to see me?"

"Because I loved you once," she said simply.

"You don't know what it means to love."

"I loved you once," she repeated.

"You think love is something to sell. To the highest bidder. And the bid was high, wasn't it? Congratulations, Frau General Brecklein." He had propelled himself blindly to her, almost without knowing it and his fingers burned into her shoulders. "God knows it must have been high when Brecklein could win over Schern." His fingers tightened as he pulled her out of the chair against him. His revulsion flung her from him. There was a spot of blood on her un-

der lip.

"You have what you came for. Now get out."

She put her smallest finger to her mouth. Her words were muted. "I haven't what I came for."

"I suppose it's the dispatch case."

She sat down again. "Why do you battle against the inevitable, Piers? As always."

"Because I do not intend to foster a next war."

"You think that Germany would foster war? After what has happened to her in the past, she of all the nations fears any incident that could bring again such conditions."

"You think I might believe those words because they come from your mouth."

HER hands moved on the white lace. "Hasn't Germany been ground into the dust? Terms—"

"Don't bring up the Versailles Treaty. If there'd been realists instead of Fauntleroy's at that peace table, we'd never have had to endure the Last War. This time we've done better, if it isn't undone."

"You are unfair." She turned her round blue eyes up to him and he stiffened. "Your hatred of Germany is because you identify the country with me."

"That isn't true." He spoke softly. "What was between you and me was between you and me. What is behind what you call my hatred of Germany is between Germany and my generation. And believe me it isn't a hatred of her little homes, her streets and her villages, the beauty of the banks of the Rhine and the different beauty of Berlin. It is a hatred of her men to whom those things mean nothing, a hatred of those who see Germany only as a sword to conquer, to whom Germany is a latent octopus whose tentacles, if fed, could encompass all of Europe. I have a hatred of those who mourn Hitler's death because they haven't yet discovered another pawn to take his place."

"You admit your hatred of Germany."

He said, "I'm afraid you didn't listen attentively. I hate the Hitlerian remnants who still believe he failed only because he was mentally unbalanced."

"There are no Hitlerian remnants, Piers." Her look was honest. "There is no one fool enough to believe that."

His eyes slanted in mirth. "You should have heard Herr General Brecklein and Herr General Schern—and your beloved Hugo a few hours ago."

"You're lying."

"I only wish I were," he said.

She held out her hand. "I would like a cigarette."

He extended the package at arm's length. It was too near. He remembered the scent of crushed roses, the petal touch of her

flesh. He saw again the curve of her throat, the dark ivory between her breasts.

The smoke curled from her lips. "There is little doubt that you will oppose the freeing of Germany from bondage."

"What bondage?" he demanded. "What has she to complain of? She can eat, sleep, build, create—in short she can do everything save manufacture instruments of war. Is that bondage? If she had been treated like Japan—"

She shrugged. "That is different. An island of aborigines."

"The Japanese might argue differently. But we need not worry about their protesting. The Asiatics have made certain Japan will not foment another war? What has Germany to complain of? She's better off physically and economically and spiritually, yes, than she's ever been."

"The humiliation."

He laughed once, short, scornful. "A nation must know humility to be humiliated."

She watched the pale blue of smoke. "There is nothing could change your opinion?"

His mouth was cruel when he spoke. "Perhaps your husband's permission to return to my bed."

"I should have known what you would be. You alone never sought me when you were in Berlin after the war. You couldn't forget the fortunes of war."

A knock sounded behind him. He ignored it. He said, "I thought love was stronger than war. But then, I thought it was love." He swung open the door silencing her pale fury.

Gordon said, "I wondered what was keeping you."

Piers knew how they'd got Gordon. The man might have planned to marry the Anstruther girl. But he was lost, hopelessly lost in Morgen von Eynar. He was, there in the doorway, ravaged by jealousy of Piers' presence in the room. The moment passed as he saw the imperfection of Piers, his shapeless hair, his undershirt. He saw Morgen's perfection.

"I was just coming down, Witt. Piers refuses utterly to join us."

Gordon, reassured, turned to Piers. "I didn't know until tonight that you knew Morn in the past, Piers."

"No?"

GORDON was lost, lost in her expertness, in her changeling delights of love. As Bianca was lost in Hugo. Two innocents, despite their modern sophistication, in the hands of the von Eynars. Both would have to suffer experience. Perhaps it would give both more tolerance if not more wisdom.

"She wanted to surprise you; she's just

in from Washington." He turned to her. "We're going over to Sherman's for a night-cap." He wanted nothing but Morgen. It explained his haste to leave a conference of important men tonight, his reluctance to come upstairs to confer with Piers. It hadn't been Bianca.

"No. But I thought you were coming up to talk over the briefcase business with me."

Morgen laid one lovely thigh over the arm of the chair. "I didn't know there was business, Witt. I shouldn't have delayed you by talking old times."

"It can wait," Gordon began.

"But no." She was gentle and immovable. "Hugo taught me early never to come between a man and his business. I will be quiet with my cigarette."

Gordon frowned at Piers. "It can wait till morning, can't it?"

"It won't take a minute now," Piers said and he wondered with self-scorn if his insistence was to keep her here longer in his sight. More probably his reason for delaying was to watch another man eaten by desire of one woman among all.

He thrust his hands into his pockets. "There seem to be certain elements in this city who believe that Anstruther entrusted his dispatch case to me." He relished the apprehension swift on her face. "Why, I don't know. The Secretary never lets it out of his hands. Perhaps, however, their reasoning runs that Piers Hunt wouldn't be here without a purpose. The most likely purpose would be to carry some messages for Secretary Anstruther."

Gordon had been afraid too, afraid he would give away too much.

"You asked if I had it?" Gordon queried.

"If Anstruther entrusted it to someone it must be either you or I, Gordon. It isn't I. It must be you."

"I don't have it."

"I'm sorry." He looked straight at Morgen. "It would have helped if you had. I could have said, Go chase De Witt Gordon. He's your quarry."

The anger raged again in her but she said nothing.

Gordon said, "What makes you think there are people after the Secretary's briefcase?"

"I've been followed."

He frowned. "That sounds melodramatic, Piers."

"Piers is melodramatic," Morgen said lightly.

He shrugged. "Is a man melodramatic because of accident of birth. Or is a man melodramatic because he is confronted with the situations of melodrama?"

She interrupted, catching Witt's hand. "Let's go. Pier's father was an actor, you know. Sometimes that accident of birth is uppermost in him."

Gordon was caught between their rapiers. The shell of social intercourse had been cracked. He said, "Can you give me a ring at the office tomorrow when you're free? I'll shift appointments. You know that you've been followed?"

"Definitely."

"And that your followers are after Anstruther's dispatch case?" His credulity was strained.

"That too." Piers grinned at Morgen. "I asked."

Gordon shook his head. He couldn't discuss it now, not before Brecklein's wife. He murmured, "Of course Anstruther wouldn't let the case out of his hands. I don't know why it should be thought that you—"

SHE said it then, what she'd wanted to say since she had come but which Piers had deferred by keeping her at bay. "Because it was seen in Pier's hands after Anstruther left the airport."

Gordon turned his amazement first on her, then upon Piers and suspicion went with it.

"That was mine. Very like Anstruther's. A hired observer might have made the mistake. In fact, two hired observers seem to have made the mistake."

"Where is that one now?" she demanded.

Piers spoke gently to Gordon. "My room has been searched. I didn't mention that. Expertly." He flicked Morgen with his eyes. "I left it in Berne."

She didn't believe a word of his lies but she couldn't make an open issue, not with Gordon here.

Gordon, the fool said, "I never knew you to carry a briefcase, Piers."

"It's an acquisition since your last trip to the continent." He dismissed them then. "I'll ring in the morning. If you can squeeze me in—"

"I'll arrange it." Gordon's face was somber. He had touched Morgen's arm but he wasn't lost completely then, his disinterest in women as interference in his career was still present. It wasn't the way a man should touch this woman. Strangely enough, she too didn't know. She didn't know because it was Piers she watched. She remembered at last who she was, what she must be. She laid her fingers on Gordon's wrist, her voice, careless enough, eager enough. "Can't we meet soon, Piers? There's so much to say."

He opened the door wide. "I'm afraid I have no time, Morgen. And nothing more to say."

He shut them out. Let her explain away his rudeness and the look on her fine face in the teeth of it. She would. And Gordon would accept her explanation. Before they reached the Persian Room she'd have him convinced that Piers was in possession of

Anstruther's case. He didn't care. He'd destroyed it. And the photostatic copies of the Anstruther papers were safe.

He undressed and lay in the darkness without hope of sleep. The sickness for her ate into him. Twelve years had been as nothing. He saw her, heard her speak; he smelled and touched her, tasted her.

Why had she come? Not to unman him. Not even Hugo could believe after what had happened that Piers could again be witched by her. That she had stirred his senses, that she would realize, for that was her trick in trade. But with the knowledge would be awareness of the revulsion she had aroused in him. She would never know that he lay here in the dark, parched with the wanting of her.

Why had she come now? He walked to the window and he sat there in the chair that had held her. He needed all his strength for what lay ahead. He didn't need a woman. He didn't need the memory of a woman who burned the soul out of a man and shucked away his carcass. She could never do to him what once she had done. He knew her treachery and her barrenness. Knowing, why must he suck at memory to assuage his terrible want of her? Why hadn't she died twelve years ago in those last merciless bombings of Berlin?

He had loved her. After her he could not know love of woman again. He was lost because his love was for evil; he could not be satisfied with good. But he was too sane to return to evil, too proud for self-destruction. He would avoid seeing her again.

He wouldn't think of her again. He'd eliminated her from conscious memory for twelve years; he could do it again. He sat there at the window until the city was silent beyond in the dark. Until the hunger in him for Morgen von Eynar was exhausted, and exhaustion emptied him of all but choice.

V

AN APE grooming his tail. Evanhurst in a dressing-gown playing with his morning cup of tea, his reed-like Virginia cigarette a finger between his lips. It wouldn't be difficult to get rid of Evanhurst, a pellet in his tea, a doctored cigarette. Schern wouldn't hesitate if he wanted Watkins to take over.

Piers folded his napkin in his hand. He said, "I was there. I know the border incidents are incidents, no more."

Evanhurst mulled, "It is a beginning. Minor, yes, but unless it is watched, each flicker stamped out—"

Piers said, "There will not be war."

"No, by Gad." The old man's head rattled. "There will not be war. We will send in our International troops. We will

watch as we have watched in Germany these years." For him, the armed supervision of Germany was already in the past.

Piers spoke out in desperation. "Have you noticed what is behind these incidents?"

"I know," Evanhurst stated, omnipotent. "Those negroes ain't content with their Equatorial State. I knew they wouldn't be, I warned Anstruther. They want all of Africa. Africa for Africans. It strikes the memory, doesn't it? Years ago it was Asia for Asiatics. Do you remember or were you too young, my boy?"

"I was a combatant in the Last War."

"You do remember. They're driving now. These incidents, episodes if you like. Driving against South Africa. Infiltration can't work; you can spot a negro. A war—that's better. There's more of them. The white birth rate falls, the negroes breed like germs, and since we've given them our medical science, nature doesn't take care of it the way it used to.

"Lebensraum. That's what they're after, the whole damn black continent." He fixed a wily eye. "We're too strong in the north for them, so they're heading south. But after they take the south—" He believed it. His brain had been diseased by Schern.

"The Germans are gentlemen like ourselves." That was Hugo von Eynar. Schern to whisper the poison, "After they take the south, the north. What price British prestige then?" Brecklein for vested interest. "We can build the planes you want if allowed, better planes. We have the knowledge, the material. We can assemble them, ship them, and they'll cost you less. There is money to be made." Three men for Evanhurst, none needed for Gordon, the woman had him. With Anstruther gone, no one else was important. The Germans knew that Anstruther was dead.

Piers said, without hope, "Have you noticed the names of those against whom the incidents have been said to occur? German all, Boer if you like or they claim Belgium, Holland. But German source."

A smile narrowed Evanhurst's mouth. "You saw that. Yes, it hasn't escaped me. Didn't think the International would care if they carved up a few Germans. Sly devils."

Even that contingency had been figured. The double cross doubled. The redouble. And what matter if a few German farm colonists were, as Evanhurst expressed it, carved up? The evil wisdom of Schern again rampant.

"They'll learn," the London secretary said and there was no humor on his face. "They'll learn, by Gad, a white man is a white man. No matter what his name."

"There is no color problem in International Peace," Piers quoted.

"If those bloody blacks choose to make one, they'll learn."

With lost hope, Piers asked, "Have you talked with Fabian?"

Evanhurst put the reed between his lips. "I've read his lying report. That's enough."

Piers said it then. "Secretary Anstruther has believed in Fabian."

Evanhurst's lips were tight over the cigarette. When he spoke it was as if he spoke of a man quite dead. "Anstruther wanted to believe in lasting peace. Belief tempered his judgment, Piers. A good man, Anstruther, perhaps too good for our realities."

Piers cried out, "Will you talk with Fabian?"

Evanhurst did not smile. "There is no reason to talk with Fabian."

Piers looked long at the old man, the ape. Determined that apedom should not be threatened. How could he be blind to Germany? She hadn't even bothered to change tactics. She had not changed leaders. Schern, Brecklein, von Eynar.

What good would it do to point out that Brecklein had been a high official in German production before and during the Last War? That Schern had been one of Nicolai's key men, of the inner secret circle? That Hugo von Eynar had commanded an air force over England, that Morgen von Eynar had been a spy?

They had answered this long ago to Evanhurst's complete satisfaction. Brecklein had worked with the Nazis, certainly; it was his only way to hold a segment of the capital class intact. Schern had been a leader in espionage, yes; he had paid, five years' imprisonment. The book he wrote in prison. "The Blind Shall See" the story of his regeneration, had been swallowed by wiser than this gullible ape. Von Eynar, who could deny any youth of those days being filled with patriotism for the defense of his country? It was easy to forgive Hugo. Furthermore he was so tall, so fair, so charming.

AND Morgen? Who would bother in peace to find excuses for Morgen after once looking upon her? Who knew she had been a spy save Piers Hunt? The others who had known were dead. Accident alone that Piers lived.

Even if Evanhurst did not in his skeptical soul believe the disavowals of these men, he did not fear. This time Britain could handle Germany before she got out of hand. Piers asked, a young man deferring to an old, an undersecretary deferring to the second most important man in the Conclave, "What will be your vote, Lord Evanhurst? On the German matter?"

The old man could smile now, on a protégé, on the grandson of an old and equal friend. "I shall vote for withdrawal. With a recommendation that the militia be sent into Equatorial Africa to observe matters there."

There was no need to remain longer. It was said. Piers left the apartment and returned to his room. He looked out at the city without seeing the towers, the spring burgeoning. He ticked them off. Anstruther, Gordon, Evanhurst, Germany was certain. The hopelessness in him was a goad. He knew now he must reach Fabian. The black man must be made to see his personal peril, the peril to his land and race, if not the peril in which the world lay. No matter what lies Germany had fed Fabian, he, Piers, could expose them. Because he had Hugo's letters to back up his personal knowledge of the incidents.

He sat at the desk and he scrawled words, crossing out, emending. He read the satisfactory text: "David. Imperative. Will tell all of desert. Come again. Same place." He put no signature to it. A signature would give away what the salutation and message would not.

If David saw it, or Fabian, they would understand.

He copied it legibly in duplicate, addressed one envelope to The New York Times, another to the Herald Tribune. He enclosed money and a note. The personal was to run until Sunday. He signed his name, George Thompson. He took then the Hugo letters. They must not be risked until Fabian had seen them. He sealed the envelope, addressed it to safe-keeping. He dropped the envelopes into the mail chute before descending to the lobby.

He didn't notice Cassidy until he was outside the hotel, his hand lifted for a cab. He beckoned, "You might as well join me."

"Might as well," Cassidy said. He followed Piers into the cab, spoke, "Fifty-fourth street precinct house Bud."

Piers said, "I'm on my way to the Peace offices."

"Captain Devlin wants to talk to you."

Piers put a cigarette in his mouth. He struck a match. "Did Captain Devlin put you on me?"

Cassidy rested his shapeless hat against the seat.

Piers vented some of his anger. "Don't tell me you're still keeping up the old gag that I'm not being tailed."

"You're being tailed all right," Cassidy agreed. "But Devlin would never have heard of it if that numbskull hadn't lost you last night. He was supposed to report to me but he got so rattled he went to his own precinct." He sighed heavily. "Then they get me out of bed and drag me down and we sort of get together on that briefcase. The one you lost."

The cab drew up at headquarters. Cassidy climbed out. "Do I pay for my own Maria?" Piers asked.

"Your cab, isn't it?"

Piers paid. None of this was Cassidy's

fault. The guy hadn't even had his twenty-four hours' rest. Piers said, "For the record, your man didn't lose me. I stayed all night at the Plaza."

"With Lord Evanhurst?"

"Yeah," Piers said. Let him have the honor. Everything went back to Evanhurst, even Cassidy's lost sleep. Devlin's face wasn't pleasant today. Piers sat down without suggestion. He started it, he himself wasn't pleasant, not now. "What do you want with me?"

"Just a little talk." The captain's heavy irony wasn't amusing. Devlin didn't know how unamusing he could be after Evanhurst. That was the amusing boy. Like that Italian in the long forgotten war Italy had waged on Ethiopia, giggling while he dropped his bombs. They were only Negroes to him, too.

"About that briefcase you lost when you were Mr.—Henderson, wasn't it?" Devlin had the report under his hand, referred to it without need.

"What about it?" Piers demanded.

"Made of the best alligator—about so big, wasn't it? With play manuscripts in it." His voice was heavy. "Play manuscripts, yet." He spoke out hard now, "Where did you get that briefcase?"

"I had it made for me at the Lake of the Crocodiles. That's in Africa, in case you aren't familiar with it. It was a good briefcase, the best. I'll admit it didn't have manuscripts in it. I wouldn't be at liberty to tell you what was in it. As for giving you the name Henderson, we of the Peace Commission must be careful not to receive publicity when on secret mission."

DEVLIN looked at Cassidy. Cassidy's lip stuck out. He said, "Could be."

"Could be, yes," Piers smiled. "Who put you on my tail, Cassidy?"

Cassidy rolled the words. "That I am not at liberty to dee-vulge, Mr. Hunt."

He turned on Devlin. "And now am I and my pet bulldog allowed to depart? De Witt Gordon is waiting for me at the Peace offices."

Devlin said, "What do you know of John Smith?"

"To which John Smith do you refer? The English adventurer or the—"

"You know damn well which John Smith I'm asking about. The guy that got bumped off by a taxicab when you lost your briefcase."

Piers didn't hesitate. "He was a little rat-toothed individual who traveled in the chair car up from Washington night before last. He was following me to get his hands on a briefcase, made to order of the best alligator skin from the Lake of the Crocodiles. He thought it was Secretary Anstruther's case." He could go into truth

now. "I presented the Secretary with one some years ago. I don't think you need ask why that Smith wanted the Secretary's briefcase. He was, as you doubtless know, a German."

If he told the whole truth, that his loss was but an invention to facilitate inquiries about John Smith—better this way. Better that he was on record as losing a case which no one, not even these cops, believed was his. It might call off the dogs long enough for David to come to him.

"Why would you be having Secretary Anstruther's case?" Cassidy asked.

Piers laughed a little. "The Secretary never parts with his. Evidently John Smith didn't know that."

Devlin asked, "How did you know this guy was a German?"

Piers met his eye. "I didn't until I came here that day to report my loss. The officer outside mentioned John Smith might well have been Johann Schmidt. The uncle's accent." He leaned to the captain. "Do you have the uncle's name and address?"

Devlin put a tooth over the corner of his lip. "Phonies. We're looking for him. We aren't going to have trouble with Germany again, are we? I was in the Last War. I don't ever want—"

"We are not going to have war again," Piers said somberly. He came to his feet. "May I go now? And must Cassidy come with me?"

Cassidy put his feet on the floor, pushed up heavily. "I get my orders, Hunt. I told you they weren't from Captain Devlin." But he wasn't unfriendly now. He didn't want war.

"And you can't tell me who or why?"

"I don't know, Hunt." He rubbed his cheek. "I don't know nothing about this case. All I know is my orders come straight from the Commissioner himself. Follow you. That's all."

"And you're looking for the briefcase, too."

Cassidy said, "I already told you that."

Piers moved slowly. He said aloud, "I wonder what the Commissioner of Police would want with Anstruther's briefcase."

There had been traitors in the Last War, in high places. This was peace. And how many without fear of stigma in time of peace, how many other than Evanhurst, were playing the German hand?

"Maybe he's wondering what you'd want with it," Cassidy said slowly.

Piers said, "That's the part I don't understand."

2.

THE girl at the desk had hair by Gauguin and the manners of royalty. She said, "You wish to see Secretary Gordon?"

"If you don't mind," Piers gave her equal hauteur. He could tell it didn't go over. "The name is Piers Hunt." His name wasn't known to her.

She spoke into a box on her desk. He walked away to a chair twisted of aluminum and cafe-au-lait leather. It was more comfortable than it appeared. The elegant young woman raised her voice one cultured notch. "His secretary will be out at once, Mr. Hunt." She seemed not a little surprised at her prowess in obtaining the secretary. He didn't protest.

The first secretary was a rarer edition of the girl at the desk save that her hair was cobalt and her mouth a deeper crimson. She sat in a chair beside Piers. "Mr. Hunt?" She held an envelope. "Mr. Gordon had to leave for Washington. The President summoned him. We tried to locate you but you'd left the hotel. Mr. Gordon asked me to give you this note."

He broke it open and read,

"My dear Piers—

The President sent for me this morning. Also wants to see you. I've asked Miss Maybrick to see about a plane for you. Sorry not to wait but he was urgent and the hotel didn't know what time you'd return."

The President must have got on to something. And Gordon was there first. Piers' eye met Miss Maybrick's. She said, "I've already ordered the plane to stand ready. One of our cars is waiting to take you to the port. Is that satisfactory?"

He put the note back into her hand. "Orders are orders." He didn't like flying with an unknown pilot, entering a prepared car, but there was nothing else to do. Gordon had had the head start.

"What time did Mr. Gordon take off?"

"About ten. It was nine-thirty when the President phoned. We called your hotel but your room didn't answer."

It would be mid-afternoon before he could reach Washington. By then it might be too late. If Gordon had known he was breakfasting with Evanhurst — he didn't know. He'd left the suite last night before the engagement was made.

"I'm ready."

Miss Maybrick said, "Beulah, will you ring the car, please?" Beulah was the creation at the desk. She was frankly puzzled now. "Mr. Hunt will be down at once."

It couldn't be that the phony von Eynar letters had been discovered, that this was a plan to get him out of the way; not with Miss Maybrick and Beulah and all the New York branch of the Peace office in on it. He was the only one in the elevator. He asked, "What time does Nick Pulaski come on duty?"

"Six o'clock." The boy asked after two floors, "Nick a friend of yours?"

They reached the first floor lobby. "I am a friend of his," Piers said. He paused at the cigar counter, bought two bars of chocolate and a pack of cigarettes, the early editions of the afternoon papers. It would be better not to think on the two-hour run to Washington. It didn't look as if he'd get any lunch. Lord Evanhurst's breakfast had fortunately been British-hearty.

The chauffeur hadn't a face, only a chauffeur's mask, but he drove neatly and without time waste to LaGuardia Field. Not until the car stopped did Piers realize how tightly he'd held himself on the drive and how foolish were his fears at this time. Nothing was going to happen to him when he'd been summoned by the President of the United States.

The pilot of the small cabin plane was American as Cape Cod. Piers settled himself with the papers, peeled a chocolate bar, and was lifted into the sky. The news sheets were on to Fabian at last. There was a photo of him from the first Conclave, dressed in his scarlet robes of state, the towering headgear reducing his face to a small dark blob. The great Fabian, the lines ran, man of mystery, leader of Equatorial Africa, has arrived by private plane from his homeland. There was no mention of where he was putting up.

There was no mention anywhere at all of Anstruther. That in itself was a warning. The State Department and the President must have learned something to substantiate rumor. There was a bland interview with Brecklein quoting statistical figures of Germany's production, and the Fatherland's hope for increased productivity in the "golden era of the coming years."

A Ward and Dunley photo went with the interview. Brecklein's pictured face was solid, prosperous, safe. No one would take notice of the thin lips, no one who had not faced the stone eyes above that mouth.

PIERS ate his second chocolate bar. He remembered Cassidy all at once, half glanced over his shoulder amusedly for sight of a plane pursuing. Certainly Cassidy wouldn't be expected to follow to the White House doors.

Piers didn't know the President. He'd seen the face and gestures in an occasional newsreel, heard the voice on screen and radio. The man was somewhat younger than Anstruther and Evanhurst's generation; he'd been coming up in politics during the Last War. He was considered a good president, neither too precious nor too common for the people at large, some kind of farm back-ground, westerly; he liked golf, fried chicken, fishing as a matter of course, and piloting his own plane. He'd strictly kept his hands

off Anstruther and the Peace policies.

The pilot in his separate cubicle had had nothing to say on the flight. Realizing it suddenly, the cold sledge of suspicion struck at Piers' stomach. This could have been a ruse. He looked out the window; green country lay quilted below. He lifted the communication, asked, "About there?"

"Yeah."

Piers replaced the phone. It was ridiculous to fear Gordon wasn't a traitor, no matter what his commitments. He had no reason to do away with Piers; he was an Anstruther man even as was Piers. And the President waited. One misadventure by plane could be swallowed but two would indubitably stick in the gullet.

The communication sounded and he lifted it. "We're coming in now," the pilot said.

"Thanks." He looked out. They were circling Washington's marble whiteness and rich green. The plane landed quietly at the airport. There were two secret service men waiting. "Piers Hunt? The car's over this way."

"How did you know me without the carnation?" Piers asked.

The one on his right said, "You came down in Gordon's plane, didn't you?"

The car was reassuring with its White House markings. There wasn't anything off color about this appointment then; the President had summoned him. And Gordon. Gordon who had got here first.

The secret service passed him into the White House by way of the porte-cochere. "The President is waiting for you in his private office." He followed them along the passageway to an unmarked door. One man entered; the other waited outside with him. Piers said, "Hot, isn't it?"

The man wiped his neck.

The other returned. He held the door open. "Go right in, Mr. Hunt." Piers was inside then, without his escort, in the comfortable, historic study of the President of the United States. The President was standing behind his desk, his hand outstretched. "Delighted you could make it, Mr. Hunt." His handclasp was practicedly strong. "Draw up a chair. They're more comfortable than they look. We haven't streamlined the White House yet. Somehow one grows attached to the old things."

Piers felt as if he'd known the man for years, he was that like his newsreel and radio self. Gordon had risen from another of the chairs of old leather. Gordon, handsome, smiling, his dark suit fresh from a tailor's, his shoes glossy, his pores untouched by human sweat. Piers' summer-weight grays were crumpled. His face needed a sponge.

Gordon said, "Thank God, you received the message, Piers. I tried to reach you early—"

"So your secretary told me." He was easy.

"I was breakfasting with Lord Evanhurst."

Gordon wondered and the President said, "I understand you're an old friend of my friend, Lord Evanhurst. Cigarette?" But his social grace went from him when they were seated again. He said, "You know, of course, Secretary Anstruther is missing?"

"Yes," Piers nodded. "Gordon told me Tuesday that he was overdue."

The President's face was sober. "I only learned last night—"

Gordon spoke quickly. "I didn't want to tell you, sir, until it was definite, but—"

"I understand." His smile and Gordon's met, accepted each other. The President continued, "It's hard to have it happen at this time. So much depends on our present Conclave."

"Yes," Piers agreed.

"I've named Gordon Secretary pro tem."

He said it as casually as if he had named a village postmaster.

Because of the casualness it was a moment before Piers realized what had been said. His eyes leaped to Gordon and he gripped the arms of the chair to keep himself from rising. Gordon had the right expression, an acceptance of condition, enough humbleness, the will to do his best. And Piers was silenced. He could not demand that he be named. Gordon was the logical man to succeed in so far as the President Ape knew. Certainly the sweating, soiled fellow who called himself Piers Hunt couldn't be selected to preside over this important conclave.

GORDON had won this set. And Piers, knowing the smugness, certain of the decision beneath the superb facade, was forced to express "Congratulations." He knew then that had Gordon communicated with him this morning he would have made certain that Piers did not accompany him to Washington.

He had planned this well, informing the President last night, stepping into the wanted shoes this morning. Gordon said with that disarming smile, "I'm still hoping that I won't have a chance to accept the position, Mr. President." And he included Piers in the smile. "I'll hope until Sunday afternoon that Anstruther will return."

"You understand," the President's voice was troubled, "we are not releasing the fact that Secretary Anstruther is missing until after the Conclave." He frowned. At that time a small notice that due to illness—illness, you understand—Secretary Anstruther cannot as yet be present, that Secretary Gordon will preside pro tem in his place."

Piers said, "I won't divulge any further information."

The President nodded his approval. Gordon caught the undertone.

"I understand the importance of secrecy." Piers' voice was a silken thread. That Gor-

don knew there was to be enmity was good. Piers couldn't stab in the back.

The President's eyes gleamed. "Gordon tells me you saw Anstruther last."

No stab in the back, not even if the other man had no such compunctions. "I saw him off in Alexandria, sir."

"Tell me about it."

He could have told it the same under scopamin. But he welcomed the opportunity to put on high official record what must be recorded. He said simply, "I phoned the secretary in Berne. There had been another touch of border trouble—you've heard of the so-called incidents?"

The President nodded. Gordon opened his mouth but Piers didn't allow him sound. "They aren't important although certain nations for their own benefits and to the detriment of Equatorial Africa have tried to blow them up as such." He smiled at Gordon, imitating the man's open, winning facial contortion. "I knew that if Anstruther could talk with the Africans, he would know this."

"You talked with Fabian?" Gordon suggested.

"No." It had been a deliberate attempt to discredit. Piers turned to the desk. "You may know, Mr. President, that it is difficult to have audience with Fabian, more so than with you for instance."

"I am always available at any time."

"I tried to see you Tuesday." He dropped it in passing. "It isn't that Fabian remains closeted in dignity; he is among his people except for state occasions. He believes this to be the wiser way of governing. He is leader of Equatorial Africa as well as Secretary of Peace, you know."

"A benevolent dictator," Gordon stated.

"No." Piers was sharp. That phrase had been in the Hugo letters, a dictator, although benevolent. "He decrees no law. All laws are made by the people." He turned back to the President. "Fabian, however, was available at any time to Anstruther. Anstruther is one of the few men in the world who actually has spoken with Fabian."

"Yes." The President's interest was titillated. "Secretary Anstruther believes Fabian to be a great man."

"Yes." And Fabian had sent David with a gun. "They are friends as well as leaders." He put a fresh cigarette in his mouth. "I'll make this brief, sir. I went into Africa when the first spot of trouble appeared. I saw with my own eyes what was causing it. The secretary and I went over my findings and he agreed with me that whereas the incidents themselves were doubtless unimportant, undeniably they were German-fomented."

The President had disbelief unflinching his mouth. "Did you say German-fomented?"

"Yes, I did, sir. I have the facts if you wish to examine them. I'll have to send to Berne for them naturally. I didn't bring

them along as I expected Anstruther to have his copies here. The proof was sufficient for Anstruther to state in no uncertain terms that he would make certain that Germany should remain under the protectorate for the prescribed years."

Gordon didn't like it at all. The President was fashioned of wonderment.

"The Secretary was ready to take the plane to Lisbon when a wire from Fabian, asking him to meet at the Lake of the Crocodiles, changed his plans. He thought it must be a new incident. There was a small plane leaving that day for the Equatorial border—the department doesn't have its own planes in Africa. I saw Anstruther off in it. He was perfectly well.

"There was no reason for me to feel uneasy and yet—after he left, I did. I made enquiries and learned that Gundar Abersohn had piloted the plane that day. The Arabian pilot had had a sudden stomach attack after breakfast. I've learned since, as I told Gordon, that Fabian was in Tibet."

THE President was a startled faun. "What do you think his happened?"

Piers lifted his shoulders. "It's possible that the Germans didn't want Secretary Anstruther to attend the Conclave, sir."

"But that's kidnapping!"

"Or murder."

The head began to pendulum again. "Oh no. Things like that don't happen today. In the Last War—"

"It isn't so far away." He couldn't keep the fear from his voice.

"No. No. This is the time of peace."

"The time for vigilance if we would continue peace. Those are Secretary Anstruther's words." They weren't but they had come from the spirit of Anstruther.

The President was moving his hands in anguish. "We cannot accuse Germany. We cannot make trouble—you have proof?" He didn't want proof; proof meant trouble.

"I have facts."

"I'd like to see them," Gordon said.

Piers looked at him. "I will cable Nickerson tonight."

"We mustn't have trouble," the President reiterated. "It is just such things as these that are the roots of war. And without Anstruther—" The anguish bit his voice now. "You think Anstruther is dead?"

"I do not believe it would be safe otherwise. He could not be allowed to return and tell."

"Yes." He accepted the inevitable. His mouth was haggard. "You'll help, Gordon? In every way? To bring the Conclave off, and after—" The search for Anstruther must wait on peace. The President leaned over his desk. "We must make certain that there is no leakage of our news, gentlemen."

He was a busy man. The office outside

was filled with appointments. Gordon and Piers were shown out through the private door under the escort again of the secret service. They were guided to a car in the drive. This had no official seal. Piers asked, "Are we sharing the plane back?"

"I'm staying over." Gordon's face was important. "I'll have to visit the department tomorrow, see how things are going." He spoke to the man at the wheel. "Do you mind dropping me at the Mayflower before you take Mr. Hunt to the airport?" To Piers he said, "I keep an apartment there."

Piers said, "I'll hop off where you do."

Gordon's eyes moved doubtfully.

"There are some men I want to see. No use making a flight for just one of us."

"I don't know when I'll get away." It came quickly.

"It doesn't matter. I don't need a private plane." He preferred a commercial ride, particularly now. "I'll go up on one of the regular runs when I finish my business."

Gordon spoke cautiously, "If you need any introductions—"

"I know the men I'm looking for."

The car left them at the door. Gordon didn't like Piers at his side entering the grandeur and glory of the corridor. Here important men and women met to settle affairs of state in private court. Here unimportant men in dirty linen didn't belong.

Piers was definitely surprised when Gordon said, "Come up and have a drink with me before we separate." He had expected Gordon to eliminate him with a nod at the elevators. Curiosity at the change of attitude made him accept the offer.

The rooms were handsome, expensive. The decor was white and ivy green, there were good original oils, even a small Renoir on the walls. Piers sat hesitantly on the whiteness of a chair. "Your own things?"

"Yes." Gordon was at the plastic bar. "I'm here most of the year. Hotel stuff is too depressing."

Salary couldn't cover it, nor could Gordon's undistinguished background afford sufficient inheritance. There were ways to make money even in the Peace Department if you knew the right men, the brilliant investments: Spanish liquors, English shipping, Russian exports, American airlines, German production. Each country would offer some means. Gordon was doubtless a rich man, and a rich man didn't have a selling price. Gordon wouldn't need to sell out peace. Morgen had been necessary.

Gordon brought the glass, crystal sheer as water, silver embossed monogram. "I didn't ask. It's Napoleon—" He sat down on the couch opposite.

Piers tasted. It was right.

Gordon drank again and when he set down the glass it rang against the metal table like a temple bell. He spoke quietly

but distinctly. "I want you to give me Secretary Anstruther's papers."

3.

PIERS drank from the glass again, drank without moving his eyes from his opponent. When he put down his glass it was without sound. He said, "I don't have them."

Gordon had expected this parry. He reasoned as with a child, "Come, Piers. It's undeniable that you had his briefcase at the Alexandria airport. That's been proven without a doubt."

"By Schern's spies," Piers bit out.

Gordon flushed slightly. "And by the English inspectors," he countered. "I won't say you know more than you've told about what has happened to the old man—"

Piers broke in angrily, "Are you suggesting that I had a—"

Gordon's voice was an iron door. "I won't say you're holding information. But you had his case in your possession. I want his papers."

Piers lifted his glass. "I don't have them."

"Listen, Piers," Gordon's choler was rising. "As acting head of the Peace Department those papers belong in my hands."

Piers drank.

"What purpose have you in hiding them? Don't you want to further peace?"

"You're calling me a liar," Piers warned.

"I don't want to call you a liar," Gordon placated. "But what else do you expect me to say? You lied to me about Anstruther leaving for Lisbon. I know the briefcase was in your possession. I know it contained his most important papers—he cabled me he was carrying them with him, too important

to trust to the air mails. Yet you deny having them."

"I told you it was my briefcase. Resemblance."

"Yours wasn't lettered with the old man's monogram, was it?" Gordon asked.

Gordon even knew that. Faded gold lettering by the hasp. But English inspectors and German spies hadn't based their knowledge on three scarred letters. They knew he had had the briefcase because they knew how it came into his possession. Gordon wouldn't mention that.

Ten to one they hadn't told him that part of it. Piers smiled. Not even Schern's spies of highest intelligence knew for certain that Anstruther wouldn't reappear. They hadn't any of them had a report on the death of Anstruther. Even Fabian's men didn't know he had died.

Gordon said, "I see no reason to quarrel. You have been a valuable man to our Peace Department."

He caught the inflection. That would be the next move.

"We're after the same thing. Peace," Gordon appeased. "If the old man gave you those papers to carry across, if he told you to guard them in utmost secrecy, I can understand. But he couldn't foresee what has happened. As matters now stand I can't conduct the Conclave as Anstruther would wish it conducted unless I know his wishes in the matter. You can surely understand that."

He could understand that. It was reasonable; it was smooth, well-oiled from every approach. And if Morgen, and bulwarking her Brecklein and Schern, were not behind Gordon's shoulders, Piers would capitulate. But he knew that papers could be

[Turn page]

DOES THE MOON AFFECT YOU, TOO?

NO, I GET MY EFFECT WITH STARS-STAR BLADES!

GNX PROCESS
STAR
DOUBLE EDGE

4 for 10c

STAR
SINGLE EDGE

doctored. He said, "I told the President what Anstruther's opinion is. If you doubt it you will see my notes when Nickerson sends them."

"Your notes, not Anstruther's."

Piers stood and looked down at Gordon, as if Gordon were far below him in a chasm. "I'll tell you what I want," he said softly. "I want to make the initial speech at the Conclave. Let me do that and I'll get you anything you want."

Gordon was sharpened to anger. He pushed up from the couch and his fist was knotted at his side. "I'm not making any trades," he stated. And then the realization of his position steadied him. His voice was cold. "As presiding officer of the Conclave, I naturally must make the keynote address." He was in, Piers out; there was no reason for generosity. "As Secretary, I do not need to trade with you. I can force you to turn it over to me. Good day, Piers."

It was no idle threat. Piers went out, rang for the elevator. He was sticky with heat. The brandy on an empty stomach didn't help. Napoleon brandy hadn't been tasted outside Germany since the days of the occupation of Paris. Gordon had attentive friends. The cage whirled to the main floor. Laughter was shaking Pier's stomach silently. Gordon couldn't lay hands on those papers for his dear friends, not for all the brandy that had been stolen from France. Nor could the dear friends turn the papers over to Gordon. They were as safe as if they'd been buried in the Nubian grave.

THE difficulty was that open rupture would mean redoubling of surveillance. He wasn't quite sure how he could safely, first retrieve and then transport the memoranda to the opening of the Conclave on Sunday. It would be chancey. Would Gordon dare dismiss him from the department? If the breach widened he would, and he'd have his neat packet of cause for the President. Refusal to cooperate with the department, hostility to the cause of peace—the lies would contain enough truth to pass muster. It would be one sure way to silence Piers in Conclave.

Gordon hadn't carried the briefcase tale as yet to the President. And why? Because he wanted to get the papers first. Because Morgen had asked for them? Gordon was wiser in the wrongs of diplomacy than his generation. Would he include suspicion of murder in his accusation? Piers scowled himself into a phone booth. Gordon had definitely hinted at that. He could discredit Piers without going that far. For the first time it occurred to Piers that it might have been Gordon who put Cassidy on him.

He looked up the number of the British

Embassy, dropped the coin and dialed. He asked for Herbert Watkins. Watkins himself came to the phone.

"This is Piers Hunt."

Watkins expressed surprise. "Where are you?"

"The Mayflower. Can you have dinner with me?"

Watkins hesitated.

Piers said, "I think it's important, Bert. I've only tonight." He didn't know if he would be alive tomorrow. Even now his trail might have been freshened, one of those well-dressed men outside could wear the colors of Brecklein or Fabian or—or Gordon.

Watkins said, "I'll meet you. There?"

He didn't want to remain here in Gordon's territory; he was afraid to take a chance on going elsewhere. He answered finally, "Yes. I'll be in the bar."

"Be around shortly."

Piers hung up. He pushed his hat forward, looking through the pane. A man was waiting for the booth. Piers stepped forth without bravery. He found the bar, took a stool that placed his back to the wall, his eyes to the door. There were glances at him, some curious, too many nose-lifted. One thing certain, he didn't look important enough to be marked for death. Neither had John Smith.

Even the barman had his nose wrinkled. Piers said, "Brandy," slung a ten-dollar bill on the bar and was sorry. Why should he give a tinker's damn about the barman's snobbery or that of his customers? He swallowed from the glass and his stomach burned. What he needed was food. Until Watkins arrived, he'd have to husband this drink, despite the disapproval of the barman.

Watkins was long. He reluctantly ordered a second drink, sipped at it. When he saw the Englishman in the doorway, he stood to signal and felt his head twirl. He kept his hand flat on the bar while the man advanced, stolid and neat in his blue serge, the weathered face below the bristled, graying head curious.

Piers sank to the stool again. "Have a drink, Bert?"

"Yes." Watkins sat next to him but he was dubious.

Piers said, "I won't take another. I haven't eaten since breakfast."

"Let's eat now."

"Have your drink first. Do you know a place we can go? I'd rather not stay here. I want to talk without Gordon hearing." He knew he was saying too much but his voice ran on in spite of himself. "The way you hesitated about coming I thought you'd been warned already to stay away from me."

"For God's sake," Watkins breathed and sympathy came over his square face. "Bad

as that, is it? I was supposed to be on tap for a call from the Lud and a state dinner. I slipped out."

"You're a friend," Piers said dreamily.

Watkins downed his drink, took Piers' arm. "We'll eat now, old man."

Piers let the Briton guide him. He repeated, "You're a friend, Bert. I'll be all right when I've had some food. I hadn't a chance to eat today. I've been with the President—fancy that!—and Secretary Gordon." He felt Watkins' fingers tighten. "Fancy that, too!" They were outside in the mildness of night. He drew back as the taxi rolled up to the curb. "You're going to take a cab?"

"Too far to walk."

Watkins pushed him in, gave an address. "We're going to my digs, Piers. We can talk there."

"He could have put something in the brandy," Piers said through the dream.

"Who?" Watkins was sharp.

"Secretary Gordon. I didn't think of it before. I hardly believe he would—yet. But he could have." And he could have appeared, opportune, regretful for an employee under liquor. He could have moved Piers to his room, the kind Gordon, the great Gordon. Such a small favor delivering him to Schern—to force the papers. Or—it wouldn't matter about the papers if Piers were dead. No, they wouldn't kill, not until they knew the whereabouts of Anstruther.

They were at another hotel. He couldn't distinguish the name but Watkins' hand was firm. The elevator crept. And then he was in a hotel room, nothing of grandeur, just a room. Watkins urging, "Don't lie down there. Get under the shower, cold." And Watkins speaking into the phone while Piers wavered to the bath, "Send up two big steaks. Plenty of strong coffee."

PIERS let the cold water smash at him. He wasn't so sleepy when he came out but his head was still light.

Watkins asked, "Better?"

"Yes, thanks. I need food."

"It's coming. What were you saying about Gordon—Secretary Gordon?"

Piers put on the dirty suit again. No wonder the glances of the men on the street had been strange.

"Yes."

"Anstruther isn't coming back?"

"Did I say that?" His eyes focused hard now. "It must be between us, Bertie. I can trust you as before?"

"Yes." Watkins' mouth was tight. "God help us, yes."

"How much do you know?"

"Anstruther's missing. That's no secret. Evanhurst is keeping me holed here just to listen in."

"I've given you a loaf."

"Don't worry. Tell me what's happened."

He couldn't tell Watkins all despite his trust. "No one knows. He hasn't been heard from. Since he left Alex."

"And you saw him off."

"You know that. Everyone knows that."

"And Gordon?"

"He's Secretary. This afternoon. By official decree. It won't be announced until the Conclave opens."

Watkins repeated his prayer. "God help us."

"You know Gordon?"

"He's Evanhurst's delight. An example to us duds."

The waiter wheeled in the table. The scent of the meat made Piers' head turn faster. "Don't get up," Watkins said. "We'll put it there."

The waiter fixed the table in front of Piers.

Watkins said, "We'll manage the rest." He shut the man from the room, pulled up a chair and seated himself across. "Eat now. Don't talk until you've eaten."

Piers felt better at once. If Gordon had tried to put him out, the dinner was counteracting the drug.

"How did it happen to be Gordon?"

"Who else? The President didn't know me. Gordon got there first."

"You know where Gordon stands?"

"Yes."

"There's no doubt?"

"None at all." He thought of Morgen's flesh.

Watkins lifted his coffee cup.

"I'm not beaten yet," Piers said. "I'm whipped but I'm not beaten. I won't be."

"You can't be. There's so few of us."

Piers hesitated. "You'd be named if anything happened to Evanhurst?"

Watkins was motionless. "Yes."

"He's old. Something could happen."

"These opportune events do not often occur."

"Something could happen to him," Piers repeated stubbornly.

For a moment nothing changed, then the man's face turned dusty. He shook a fierce head. "No. No. Nothing like that."

"I'm not suggesting death, Bert," Piers told him quickly. "But if he could be prevented from attending the Conclave—"

"You're drunk," Watkins said.

"Not now. A recall to London. A mission to India."

"He checks too carefully."

"A slight sickness," Piers persisted.

There was no expression on Watkins' face while he thought about it. He made decision. "No. I couldn't be a party to it, Piers. I've worked my way up to the place I hold in International Peace against plenty of odds—with him at the top, there's always plenty. But I've kept the peace. Some day I'll have

his place and be able to carry on as I want. Until then I'll keep plodding."

Piers accepted the finality but he accused, "You won't deny peace but you'll let the Germans take it away from you."

"I don't believe they can."

"You don't? With Evanhurst and Gordon as lead sheep? Who do you think can stop the withdrawal? Even Fabian's on their side. Who is going to speak for peace?"

"The people."

He too had once had eternal faith in the people. But that was when the people had had a leader, when Anstruther had given them voice. "The people." Piers shook his head. "Give them bright pretty peace and they'll take peace. Give them war all dressed up in shiny slogans and they'll take war."

"The people didn't want the Last War, Piers. There was never any spirit for it, not even in its necessity. You can't give the people another war. They are through with war."

"God knows I hope you're right," Piers said without hope. "But they haven't a voice."

"They will be heard." Watkins passed his cigarettes. "What's this about Fabian going over?"

"I don't know. He sent a man to talk with me at gunpoint the other night. Schern's men are after me too, and there's New York detectives."

Watkins frowned.

"They're all after Anstruther's papers. I'm supposed to have them."

Watkins caught at a hope. "You do?"

"I don't."

"But, Piers—"

Let suspicion tweak Watkins' eyebrows. He was too tired to care. "If I could speak to Fabian, then I'd believe we could beat the Germans."

"You could try."

"I've been refused." He put his hand to his head. "I haven't been accused of murder yet. It will come."

"Anstruther is dead," Watkins said somberly.

"No one knows." He spoke out of passion. "Only two things have counted with me in twelve years, Bert. Anstruther and peace. I won't watch peace go too." He said, "Will you ride with me to the airport?"

"Stay over with me."

"I must go back. Fabian's there. Maybe he'll realize I can help him."

Watkins' face was sad. "I can't go along with you on violent means. I can't betray peace."

"I understand. Only I know better. We'll have to fight for peace this time. The apes are getting strong again." He put his hand in Watkins'. "Whatever you may hear of

me between now and the Conclave, withhold judgment. I don't know how I'll have to play it from here on out. Just believe that whatever I do or say will be for one thing—peace in the world."

Watkins' clasp was strong. Stronger than his own.

VI

IT WASN'T midnight when he entered the Astor Bar. They were there waiting for him. He hadn't expected them to be here tonight; they should be celebrating their victory in a more fitting way than a casual drink. But they couldn't celebrate properly without the skull of their enemy for a cup. The witchery of Morgen's face, the curve of her arm beckoned him. He pushed himself to the table and stood above them.

Hugo rose insolently, Brecklein with fat reluctance. Bianca's cold young face was watching something far away. Piers' eyes traveled over Morgen, her throat, the rose-red stuff folded over her shoulders and breast. He said, "You've been on my mind all evening, Frau General Schern."

"Brecklein," Hugo's voice was flat.

"My mistake." He sat down in Brecklein's chair and he laid his hand on Morgen's arm.

She said, "Did Gordon return with you?"

They knew as he had known that they knew. They knew where he had been this day. They knew what the outcome must have been. He said, "No. Excellent brandy, Gordon has." His lips twisted. "Drinking brandy with Gordon, I thought of you."

Brecklein asked dubiously, "Gordon remained in Washington?"

"Yes." He craned up, scowling. "Get a chair. I can't talk to you up there." He moved his finger over Morgen's flesh. "You're warm," he said.

Brecklein managed a chair. "Gordon did not say how long he would remain in Washington?"

Gordon hadn't communicated with them as yet. They didn't know the deal had been consummated. They wouldn't know from him. He said, "Gordon sent no messages, Herr Brecklein." He hated the touch of her. She burned like acid into the bones of his fingers. "I'll have a brandy."

Morgen said, "Witt asked us to meet him here."

"Important business." He shut out the others. "Do you remember, Morgen,—the snow and the shell of the Adlon? We found champagne, iced by winter. Do you remember that night, Liebchen?"

Her eyes were wary. He put his elbows on the table and he leaned himself to the frozen young girl across from him. "You don't remember the war, Bianca, do you? You were too young to know it." He forced her hostile face to notice. "And the bombs

didn't drop over here, tearing to pieces children and women and the old men. War is only a word to you, an outmoded word like feudalism and plague and slavery. You don't believe in it any more than you believe in those forgotten evils."

Morgen warned, "The war has been over for many years."

"I keep forgetting." He came back to the table, turned his head slowly to see her. "You were the most beautiful thing I'd ever known, Morgen." He touched the gossamer of her shoulders. "We met during that raid. You were wandering, lost, and so was I. Two lost babes in the broken Adlon."

"It has been rebuilt," Brecklein inserted with ponderous pride. "Most modern. The rehabilitation of Berlin has been astounding to all who have seen."

"Piers has seen," Morgen said impatiently. "He's been in Berlin since the war."

They knew that. Not from a casual remark from someone he'd bumped into there. It wouldn't be from that.

"You know?" Brecklein said. "Astounding, is it not?"

"Astounding indeed," Piers bowed. "Germany is a remarkable country."

Morgen watched, uneasy, because he had forgotten stability and might forget again. Hugo watched, uneasy, because he didn't want Bianca to be disenchanted, or even Brecklein to know too much.

Piers lifted his glass. "I should toast Germany, that remarkable nation." The liquid spilled as he set it down untasted. And he saw by the door the familiar watching face of Cassidy. He called out, "There's Cassidy." His hand signaled. "Hugo, you must invite Cassidy over for a drink." If Cassidy came, saw their faces, the detective would know. He called out, "Cassidy, there! He's my private bodyguard, you know." He shouted, "Cassidy!"

The detective lumbered over but he wasn't pleased. "So you're back?"

"Safe and sound, if not tidy. Did you miss me? Or were you with me? To the very door of the White House. You will join my friends for a drink? Allow me to present Frau General Brecklein. Her husband, Herr General Brecklein. And her beloved brother, Hugo General von Eynar." Their hostility closed round him. But he wasn't afraid with Cassidy planted there. "All of Germany's Peace Commission. You didn't know Germany too had a Peace Commission? And this young lady is Miss Bianca Anstruther. You remember Secretary Anstruther?"

Cassidy mumbled, and added ill-at-ease, "No drink for me. I'm on duty." He lumbered away.

"He doesn't like the company I choose." Piers spoke lightly and the bitterness in Bianca's face was only a shadow of the bitterness enveloping him. "None the less I

choose my own company. Morgen, the maid of Adlon; Morgen, the fay; Morgen, the—"

Bianca spoke sharply. "Hugo, take me home." Disgust blanched her face.

"You mustn't mind me," Piers said gently. "I'm leaving. I might say too much if I remained here." He spoke softly: "There is now no man alive to whom I dare speak my heart. I know, in truth, that it is a noble thing for man to fetter his feelings, to guard his tongue, whatever he may think."

Morgen's hair was against his cheek. His words were for her ear alone. "Tomorrow noon, the Plaza. Alone. Important."

She shook her head.

"There are some things you would like very much to know." He looked into her eyes, her candid, sea-blue eyes.

She gave unwilling assent, fearing the trap. She herself had set too many.

"Good night." He lounged to the door, catching a glimpse of their huddle as he left the room. Swine and one small misguided pearl. He marched blindly to the news counter.

Cassidy said, "I didn't think you'd be drinking with Heinies." His face sweated disgust.

Piers just looked at him. "We're all one big happy family. Haven't you heard of peace?"

"That's not what you were saying this morning."

He took the papers. "Skip it. I'm not the spokesman for peace any more." He went up wearily to his room. David wasn't there. He took off the dirty suit, kicked it in a heap on the rug. He didn't want to see it again. He doubted if he'd be here much longer. As soon as Gordon could unwind some red tape.

He wondered if Gordon had cabled Nickerson. There wasn't anything worth sending for; Piers didn't keep important notes in the office. He showered, shaved, laid out his things for morning. His room had been searched again. It didn't matter. He'd have to be at the Plaza before noon. The main thing was to remain out of custody. The main thing was to keep alive.

He read the papers for an hour or more before turning to sleep. It was as he knew it would be when the light was out and Broadway flickered now dark, now bright against his eyes. The old sickness again, the linger of her arm against his forefinger, the odor of her yellow hair, the promise of her voice. He had to play it this way. It was his only hope of breaking Gordon.

2.

HE LEFT the hotel before eleven, followed by Cassidy and a moon-faced man who read license plates. And doubtless somewhere beyond them by a dark man of

the bush. He lost the first two in Times Square, the old last-man-on-the-subway trick. It took time but it was worth it. He didn't know if he'd lost the bush tracker. He rode as far as 72nd for safety, took a downtown train to Columbus Circle and walked across town to the Plaza. He wouldn't go up to his room; he must not be closeted with her.

He went to the desk, asked that he be paged on a call. When he turned she was just entering the lobby. She was in navy with ruff of white, and when she saw him her face lighted as if some flame leaped within her.

He said, "I'm a little surprised that you came."

"You asked me to come." Her eyes were dark as sapphire.

He put his hand under her arm. "We won't lunch here. I've just avoided my bulldog and the mongrel at his heels." He steered her out of the hotel and into a cab. She sat there quiet, waiting. He said, "You are the loveliest thing I ever saw."

"That isn't why you asked me to come."

He leaned to the driver. "When there's no cab following get us to Seventy-ninth and Amsterdam. But be certain."

The cabbie saw a horned husband. He winked in his mirror.

"There's an old hotel, an aunt of mine once lived there. It'll be quiet at this hour."

The cab ran a couple of red lights on Columbus. After that it cruised to the directed corner. "You're safe, Mister."

Piers matched the face and identification. Another Pole, Willie something. Could be Nick Pulaski's brother-in-law. He added an extra bill to the charge. "If you're around here in a couple of hours, we don't want to walk downtown."

"Keep your eyes open." The cabbie winked again.

Piers opened the street door into the cool, fumed oak tap-room. There were two aging women in one booth with a coal-colored French poodle. A casual was at the bar. Piers sat across from Morgen in a sheltered corner, suggested from the menu, gave the orders. They sat in silence until the food was placed.

She spoke slowly, "What was the meaning of your act last night?"

He said, "It wasn't an act."

Her eyes would haunt him always. "It wasn't real. The other night, your hatred, that was real."

He had to play it carefully. She was wise, as wise as she was beautiful, as beautiful as bad. "Yes, that was real," he admitted. "I hate your guts." He watched her flinch and he savored it. "But there's the reverse side of it. You know that one too, don't you? I've spent twelve years making certain I was through. And then

you came. A man can hate—and want."

"You want me?"

"More than anything in the world." It was true. That the denial of that want was stronger, he wouldn't know. Not yet.

Her lashes curved like shadows. "I am married to Caesar."

"And there's Gordon," he said.

She was alert. "He is a friend of Hugo's. We met him at Rio, several years ago."

"You and Hugo?"

She was defensive. "Ernst was there on business. Hugo helped me pass the time." Her words came with difficulty. "Why didn't you return that night?"

"The war is long ago," he jeered.

"I waited for you."

"In Hugo's arms."

Her hand touched her cheek as if he had struck her.

"I came too soon." His voice was ugly.

"I was headstrong that way. Remember?"

"When did you come?"

"That afternoon. I'd made a frightening discovery. I'd learned that your Brother Hugo wasn't one of us. He belonged to Schern's inner secret circle." He shrugged. "I thought he was the key that you and I had been seeking."

She didn't move.

"I came rushing to tell you, to save you."

She said, "Yes."

"Hugo was with you. You didn't dream I'd take the chance of coming by day. Risk didn't matter when it came to saving you. Hugo was with you. And he wasn't your brother. You were laughing." His ears were tortured again by the intimacy of laughter. "You were speaking without fear. I'd found what I was after."

She began to fork her food again. "Afterwards—why didn't you give me over to the International Court to be tried for war guilt?"

"Because I couldn't bear that you should die."

SHE met his face now. "I loved you. That was why you didn't die."

"I didn't die because I got out fast. In a way that even you and Schern hadn't heard about." He began to eat as if eating mattered.

"You were to have been executed long before that. We had your information. I created delays. While you were listening, while I was lying to Hugo, I was plotting your escape. I was going with you as we had planned." That terrible honesty in which there was nothing but lies. "You don't believe that, Piers."

He said, "Let's remember it's all over, long ago. You're here. I'm here. There's no war. We disagree as to what the Peace Conclave should decide but it doesn't matter much."

She cried, "You must believe me. I've willed that you should know. After the war I waited for you to speak—or to return—"

"Then you married Brecklein. I thought it would be Schern. More important. But then he was imprisoned for five years, wasn't he? And Brecklin's a millionaire."

"I married Ernst only three years ago."

He didn't apologize. He said, "You shouldn't waste your time on me. I'm not important. You know now why Gordon stayed on in Washington."

Her hand moved. "Yes. He called me last night. Secretary Anstruther is missing." She added quickly, "No one is to know."

"I don't think it was news to you. You have Gordon. You don't have to be nice to me. But you can answer one question. How important is Gordon to you?"

The surprise of the question lifted her face. "What do you mean?"

"I don't like Gordon." His eyes were blank. "I don't like him inheriting the position. It should have been mine."

"Yes. It should have been yours." She searched his face for cause, for treachery, for honesty. "What is it you want?"

He said, "What price Gordon?"

She took her time, silent while he lighted her cigarette and his own. She said then, "The Anstruther papers."

He broke the match in his fingers. She had said what he willed her to say. He began gently, "You know me better than that, Morgen."

"You asked that I bid." Her eyes were upon him, unflinching, unmoving.

He shook his head. "Without the papers, what would the Secretaryship avail me?"

Her voice whipped. "Why would you need the papers if you were Secretary?"

"I've never sold out to an enemy."

"It is better to have a price, than to die?"

He set each half of the broken match carefully on the oaken shield that lay between the woman and himself. The words came slowly. "You believe I am to die?"

She was silent.

"Like Anstruther." The smile hurt his mouth. "You are not the only ones who want the papers, you know. Gordon needs them badly." He kept smiling. "He'll never lay eyes on them if his dear friends get in first. His price might be better. All of your heads. That might be as good as his head." He touched the table. "And he isn't the only one. Fabian wants those papers. I daresay Evanhurst would like them. Even the New York Police Department wants them."

She said with certainty, "But not one other can give you Anstruther's place. The position you should have had, that you intended to have."

He set his face. "What proof can you give me? Unless I see Gordon's head on the platter I wouldn't close any deal with you and your friends."

Her lips moved with something like scorn. "You will sell out for that?"

"Every man has his price just as every woman makes mouths in a glass. That was said long ago. And I tried to tell it to you on Sunday night."

She was rigid. "It is well for you that you lowered the price."

"Gordon might think I'd upped it." His eyebrows slanted. "I want a meeting with all of you, Gordon present. I want confirmation before I sell."

"I'll tell Schern."

"And Hugo."

She gathered her gloves, her navy purse. "I shall tell Hugo."

"Tomorrow is Sunday."

She understood. "Tonight. The Waldorf. Late, say midnight."

"The witching hour." His lips curved without mirth. "A trap won't work. Cassidy will be behind me, you know. There's no good Schern thinking he'll take the papers without paying my price. And you might mention, if I die, no one of you, nor Gordon, will ever lay hands on those papers."

They met face to face, each leaving the opposite oaken bench. He said, "Morgen—" and he put his arms around her and his mouth on hers. They held each other and no one cared. They held each other as alone, as undisturbed, as once they had been in the burning fragments of Berlin. They parted as simply as they had come together.

She pushed the hair from her cheek. "Don't play at love, Piers."

"I'm not playing that it's love." He moved at her side. "I may have to go underground at any time. If I do I'll somehow manage to get to you." He opened the door and they left the old and cool room for the heat of the pavement. "There's our driver."

The cabbie opened the door for them. "Where to?"

Piers turned to her.

"It doesn't matter," she said. "The Metropolitan," she decided.

"Museum?" The driver's nose puzzled.

"Please."

Piers nodded. He didn't touch her. He knew too well how this could all be part of the evil charm.

He laughed. "I'm glad you came today, Morgen."

She spoke under her breath. "Why?"

His jaw was set. "Gordon's out to get me. I'm going to get him first."

The driver took the transverse across the park, circled to the Museum. Piers helped her to the walk. They didn't touch hands.

She said, "When you were young I knew ruthlessness was a part of you. Peace hasn't

changed that. You must be careful. There are others as ruthless as you and more desperate."

He threw back his head and laughed out loud. "I'm not afraid." He watched her vanish and the chill encompassed him. He knew with a sudden prescience what had escaped him until now. His price would be met. After he was dead, Gordon would automatically be restored to power. Either way, with or without the papers, he was marked for death before sundown tomorrow.

3.

THE driver said, "Coming with me or you going to just stand there mooning, Mister?"

Piers turned, grasping at the straw of friendliness. "Yes." He climbed back into the cab. Why had she chosen the Metropolitan? To continue the game she'd started to get hold of herself after the sad sound of memory and love turned to bitterness? To see the pictures?

"Where to?"

Piers considered. "Grand Central."

The cab started. The driver winked again at his mirror. "Better get that lipstick off your face before you take the train, Mister."

"Thanks." He took his handkerchief and rubbed at his mouth. "Do you know Nick Pulaski?"

The driver considered. "I used to know a Mildred Pulaski once. Worked in a bakery in the Bronx. Is she any relation?"

"I only know Nick," Piers said.

"Might be his sister. They was a big family. She was a pretty good-looking girl. Don't know what happened to her. I got changed over to Manhattan. Make more money in Manhattan. The Bronx only tips a dime."

Piers said, "How do you feel about peace?"

"What do you mean?"

"About peace. War and peace."

"There's not going to be any more wars." The driver's face was complacent. "The next big shot that tries to start a war is going to get his head bashed in like a cantaloupe."

"That's the way I feel," Piers said. "But the Germans want the International troops withdrawn. They want to build aeroplanes again. After that guns, and munitions to put in them—"

The driver was vociferously obscene about the Germans.

"I agree," Piers said. No man wanted war. No man had ever wanted war. But the apes smashed stones down on the heads of those things groping through the jungles, watched them turn to rend each other. And the apes scratched their behinds with amused fingers, a substitute for thought.

At 50th the driver said, "I think there's a cab following."

Piers slipped down lower on the upholstery. "Can you see who's in it?"

"No."

She had chosen the Metropolitan. Because there would be someone to signal there? She knew he had lost his pursuer. It was important to pick Piers up again.

"I want to see who's in it. Any ideas?"

"Are you afraid of getting clipped?"

"No, I'm not." Death was stalking him. And he wasn't afraid. He had a mission to perform. He had to carry it through because there was no one else to take over.

"Then I could turn down a side street and when there's no traffic stop. But I don't want no trouble."

Piers said, "I don't carry a gun."

"I don't want no corpses in my back seat neither."

"I'll duck." He smiled. "See what you can do"—he re-read the identification tag—"Willie."

"Always a sucker." Willie swung west on 47th. He reported, crossing Eighth Avenue, "It's following all right. Is it her husband?"

"It isn't a woman," Piers said. "It's peace."

"Are you nuts?" The face was screwed up.

"I'm not nuts, Willie. The Germans don't want me to show up at the Peace Conclave."

"Well, why didn't you say so?" His ugly face stuck forward. "I got a gun."

Piers said softly, "Don't use it. Unless he attempts something funny." His voice sharpened. "If he does, empty both barrels in the son of a gun."

"Don't worry."

The cab lost speed. "Don't want them to know we're tricking," Willie reported. He stopped on the other side of Tenth, in front of a frowsty tenement with kids skating and scrapping on the sidewalk.

PIERS shifted to watch the following cab. It had slowed before realizing the maneuver. Now it attempted speed but the passenger was visible as it passed. It was the moon face.

"Recognize him?" Willie asked.

"Yes. German."

"What do we do now?"

"Grand Central." It was as safe as any place. The Astor was known and the Plaza. He'd have to find a new hole. He didn't dare use the Lucerne after taking Morgen there. Where could he go?

"I'll get away. It may cost you."

"I can pay." Piers took two tens, handed them over. "If it's more, all right."

"I wasn't doubting you could pay," Willie said with belligerent ears. "I just didn't know how far you were willing to go."

"All the way."

"That's all I wanted to know." He made a U turn, rolled out of the street the wrong way. Piers sank back and rested. It must

have been Morgen who set them on him again. No one else could.

They were somewhere among warehouses when Willie asked, "You in a bad spot?"

"Desperate."

"If you want a hideout, I could maybe help you."

"I've been trying to think of one. I have no friends."

"Well, it's my brother-in-law. He got in some trouble—he's an Eye-talian—they're hot-blooded. It wasn't murder, the guy didn't die. Anyone he's hiding out. We could put you in with him. It's safe."

Piers repeated as if the word were in a foreign tongue. "Safe."

"I can tell you that, it's safe. Me and Josie run in every day or so—bring him food and the papers and a bottle—nobody's ever find you there."

Piers asked, "I couldn't go in and out?"

"No, sir." The driver shook his head with force. "You might lead someone to Paulie. But you'd be safe."

"I'm sorry." He was. A place to sleep without fear, beside a criminal. "I'd have to be free to come and go."

Willie's head was doleful. "That's too bad. You'd be safe with Paulie. Grand Central?"

He looked at his watch. After three. He said, "No. If we're clear, take me to Central Park. Uptown, around a Hundred-and-tenth will be all right. Make it the West Side."

Willie cocked an eye at him. "Okay," was all he said.

There was nothing else he could do at the moment unless he chose to walk into the arms of pursuers. Willie set him down above 110th. The cabbie said, "Wait a minute." He took a dingy card from his pocket and with a wetted stub of pencil printed on it. "If you need help again, you call up this number and ask for Willie. If it gets too hot for you I'll pick you up and take you where Paulie is. It'd be better to stay inside than get bumped off."

Piers said, "Thanks." He watched the reluctant cabman drive away.

He walked up the hill, away from the whirl of tires on the drives. There was no sound where he rested but the play of children, a nursemaid humming an old song. Only one day to go; from now until tomorrow's sundown. He must remain free, and alive for that long. He was the only barrier between the success of the apes and peace.

His death had been decreed. Morgen had warned beneath her breath. Because she knew if he came to them tonight, he would die? But she also knew he would not come. On the chance he did come, she would have to report the presumptive sale of his honor to the others. They would believe; they knew man only in their own ape image. Gor-

don would be told how small he was.

His death was more important to them than the papers now that Gordon was named, now that Anstruther was given up as lost. But for one factor. They couldn't know but that the documents would be automatically passed on to another if he were eliminated. Because of that, they would allow him to dangle a little longer in this life before they snuffed him out. They would prefer the treachery of paying a price before the kill.

There was yet the final move before tomorrow, the retrieving of the memoranda. He would be trailed threefold when he went for them. Unless Willie could help him out. He would recover the papers. True, he would have no voice in the Conclave; Gordon would see to that.

Yet if David came tonight, if he could be taken to Fabian, he might yet have a chance. And if David didn't come—voice or not, he would attend the Conclave. The galleries were open to the people. The people could see but the people could not speak. If he could do nothing else, he could give Anstruther's words to the people, there among them. He would make the people speak.

HE WOULDN'T despair. His voice would be the voice of Anstruther and he would be heard. He had only fear to fear. Fear or wisdom. Fear that even now, Morgen, in scorn of his warning, would be baiting the trap. Fear that if he didn't attend the proposed meeting, he would be carried there by force.

That was his only fear. Not of death, for he would not die until his time for death was given. But to be made captive, forced to divulge the whereabouts of the papers. He had no fine ideas of his bravery; there had been tortures divined of evil in the Last War which would compel a braver man than he to talk. He must remain free.

Strength was returning in the comparative peace of afternoon in Central Park. If he could but sleep here this night, under the stars. He couldn't. He would have to return to the room which hung above Broadway, return and wait there with his last faint hope of Fabian.

When the sun was low he began to walk, southward, toward the interlocking tower of buildings. He walked the length of the park and he wasn't tired but he was hungry. If he were to be hunted this night, in hiding tomorrow, he would at least have the strength in him of dining well.

The vermilion borders of a Longchamps bannered and he went in, but he couldn't taste the food he ordered. He kept watching for someone watching him. He saw no one. It would be ironic if, now that he was prepared for flight, the shadows should be withdrawn. His importance nullified by the solidifying of Gordon's position. No use in

fathering that wish.

He wouldn't return to the Astor until an hour when he could slip in unnoticed. He walked to Fifth, caught a downtown bus. The top deck was filled. He selected a seat down stairs near the rear door to watch for a descending passenger. He picked up an evening tabloid discarded there, began going over the columns for a possible item on Fabian. His head bent closer to the gossip column.

He read the lines twice and anger was red in him. A pairing of names. Bianca Anstruther and Hugo von Eynar. The sly insinuation that Gordon was definitely relieved over a broken betrothal. He read the notice again and he didn't believe it more than gossip but the signature was that of a man presumed by himself and his public to be omniscient. Wedding bells couldn't mean Gordon and Morgen. She was Caesar's wife. It could mean only that Gordon had given the Anstruther child into the unclean hands of Hugo.

He crushed the paper tight in his hand as he pushed the button, flung himself from the bus. He was in the 30's. He strode uptown, not wasting time standing for a cab. He'd attend that meeting tonight. He didn't care if it did mean walking into their trap; he'd been in other of their traps and escaped. This violation was not to be allowed. The disposal of Bianca might have nothing to do with peace but she was all that remained of Anstruther.

This first blow against Hugo would be the preliminary skirmish before the battle for destruction of Germany's wicked plan. But it would count. Hugo should know tonight that all the cards were in Piers' hand, that he intended, despite Gordon, despite Evanhurst, despite Fabian, to play them tomorrow.

At 42nd there was an empty cab waiting and he ordered savagely, "Waldorf Astoria." Only when he was standing at the hotel desk did he know that Hugo wouldn't be lounging here waiting for him. It was too early. The clerk repeated, "Mr. von Eynar is not in."

He set out again, still clutching the paper, caught another cab. "The Plaza." He'd track him through the accustomed haunts. He gave the bellboy a bill and pointed to the Persian Room. "Find out if Hugo von Eynar is in there."

"You want to see him?"

"Yes, I want to see him."

"What name, sir?"

Piers stared at the empty-faced boy. "John Smith." He laughed.

The boy returned without Hugo. Piers went to the desk, asked, "Will you see if Hugo von Eynar is with Lord Evanhurst?"

The clerk stated, "Lord Evanhurst is in Washington."

He turned on his heel. He signaled the first cab. "The Astor." He saw none of the painted couples in the lobby, striding out for the bar. He heard nothing until he was stopped by words, by a big lump of a man in his path.

Cassidy was curious. "Where've you been?"

IT WAS the first realization he had that he was walking back into the surveillance which he had carefully cleared. At the moment it didn't matter. He said, "I'll tell you all about it after I see—"

Cassidy didn't let him pass. "I got something to tell you first."

Piers' eyes saw Cassidy then and he saw the determination in the loose face. His hand tightened over the newspaper. He said, "Please. I just want a few moments with Hugo von Eynar and then I'll—"

"Von Eynar isn't in there."

He hadn't expected this to fail. He let the bitter disappointment ride him.

"None of them are. I got something to tell you. I'll stand you a beer. But I know a better place we can go."

Piers half heard. "Do you know where von Eynar is?"

"Mebbe." The eyes were shrewd. "You going with me?"

"Listen. Please listen. It's important I see Hugo von Eynar—"

"I know." Cassidy's hand was fatherly on his sleeve. "But you better talk to me first."

Piers saw in the light blue eyes something that was not to be denied. But it was important he face Hugo before sanity ruled away the words he must fling, turning him craven again. "If you'll tell me where von Eynar is—"

"I'll tell you," Cassidy said. He urged him like a child towards the 44th street entrance. He kept on talking. "I'll tell you anything you want to know. Over a beer it goes better."

Impatient and helpless Piers went along, towards Eighth Avenue, into a small bar that only its intimates would know. Cassidy nodded to the bartender, "Couple of beers," and he led the way back to the farthest corner.

Piers noticed the paper in his hand and he laid it open on the table, smoothed that column. "Have you seen this?" He pushed it in front of Cassidy.

The detective read slowly. "What about it?"

Each word was venom. "I know Hugo von Eynar. I knew him in the Last War. There's no decency in him. She's only a little girl. She hasn't any standard of values to go on. I don't intend it shall happen."

Cassidy put the heavy mug to his mouth. "What you planning to do?"

"I don't know." He spoke with cold

clarity. "I only know he isn't going to marry Bianca Anstruther. He destroyed her father."

Cassidy said, "After what you said in Devlin's office, I thought you didn't like Germans. I didn't care about seeing you with them last night."

"It turned my stomach," Piers answered. "But I have a job to do. Maybe in your job you have to be seen with some kind of men you wouldn't spit on."

"Maybe you're right."

Piers put down his mug. "You said you'd tell me where to find von Eynar."

"Mr. Gordon's having a little dinner party in his suite at the Waldorf. I wouldn't be surprised but you'll find von Eynar there. Mr. Gordon seems kind of friendly to the Germans."

Piers finished his beer. "Thanks. I'll—"

Cassidy's big hand closed over his wrist. Piers looked down at it without comprehension.

"Hold on. Remember I got something to tell you."

"I remember." The impatience to meet with Hugo welled again.

The hand didn't move. "I'm supposed to arrest you tonight."

"Why?"

Cassidy took away the hand. "That's what I'm going to tell you. You want to buy a beer now?"

"Yes." He had to think; it had come too soon. He'd expected it tomorrow, not today. The waiter in the stained apron brought two more mugs. Piers watched the foam. "So I'm under arrest?"

"Not yet."

PIER'S eyes jumped to the steady face.

"I got my orders to bring you in."

"Captain Devlin?"

"The boss."

"What charge?"

"Material witness in the disappearance of Secretary Anstruther."

"They can't do that. Secretary Anstruther is—" He couldn't tell Cassidy that Secretary Anstruther had met death in Africa and that the jurisdiction of the New York commissioner couldn't extend that far.

"Do you mean they're saying that Secretary Anstruther isn't going to return?"

"They're saying he's missing. Winchell went on the air special tonight saying Anstruther's missing and that every mother's son in New York better turn up at the Conclave tomorrow to stand up for peace. He named you as the guy that knows too much. The government isn't talking but they had to do something. My boss thinks if you're locked up, you can be made to give up those papers you have."

Piers said then, "How does the New York police figure in this?"

"Samuel Anstruther was a New York

citizen."

"I see." He drank thoughtfully. "Who directed the Commissioner?" He eyed the man. "You see I happen to know that all news of the Secretary was to be suppressed until after the Conclave opens. I heard that from the President himself."

Cassidy said, "It's a request from the President himself."

Behind that a request from Gordon. The President wouldn't ask that Piers Hunt be locked up for investigation concerning Anstruther. The President didn't know that Piers Hunt counted, scarcely knew he existed.

That was Gordon's answer to his defiance. Not to fire him from the Commission. That would cause too much speculation at this time; it would hurtle the fact of a missing Secretary into the faces of the representatives. Furthermore Gordon possibly held a residue of fear that Anstruther might return, that he would have to answer to Anstruther.

The clever Gordon, the superb Gordon, the damnable Gordon. Ridding himself of the threat of Piers so simply. He damned Gordon from silent white lips. Then he saw Cassidy. "Why have you told me this?"

The detective scrubbed his cheek as if he needed thought for an answer. "I'll tell you. Devlin and me were in secret service in the Last War. We saw a lot of funny things. Folks that were on our side being made to look like they weren't. And folks against us purring up to the right parties and fooling those parties. Devlin and me, we believe you meant what you said yesterday. We think you're for peace." His eyes hardened now. "If we're wrong, well, I'll pick you up easy. I've never lost a man I've been after."

Piers didn't smile. "Then I'm not under arrest."

"You broke away from me when we got to Broadway. Better keep out of my sight though. When I see you again I'll have to run you in. But you can have the chance if you want it."

"I want it." He added, "You'll get hell for this, Cassidy."

Cassidy looked at him as if he were very young. "I've been in the game a long time, boy. I'm not worried about this boss. All I'm worried about is war. I've been through two already."

Piers said, "Gordon isn't going to like it."

Cassidy wiped the heel of his hand across his mouth. "Neither is that German woman who was with him down to the Commissioner's office."

Piers' eyes shuttered.

"She says you were trying to sell her the Anstruther papers."

"That was how they got the Presidential request." He spoke to himself. He, the idiot child, believing Morgen's betrayal would be predictable. It had never been.

"I don't like Germans," Cassidy said. "Three of my boys came back from the Last War; three didn't."

Piers pushed back his chair, holding the newspaper. "Thanks." He put out his hand to clasp Cassidy's. "You haven't bet the wrong horse. Maybe it'll look like it before tomorrow, but you haven't."

"I'm a poor loser," Cassidy said. "I don't bet only on sure things."

"How long a start are you giving me?"

Cassidy shook his head. "I'll be right here with Mike and my beer until bedtime. Tomorrow . . ."

VII

THERE was a cab up the block near 44th street. Piers avoided it, plunging around the corner to 45th, walking quickly towards the lights.

On Broadway he picked up a cruiser and rode back to the Waldorf. Despite the dangers he had to finish this. After, he'd hide out until tomorrow.

He didn't know the suite number; he asked at the desk. "De Witt Gordon."

The clerk looked quickly at Piers but tonight Piers wasn't rag and bobtail. The man was courteous. "Your name, please?"

Piers said without hesitation, "Watkins. From Washington."

He waited until the call was completed. "Go right up, Mr. Watkins. Suite C. The fourteenth floor."

The elevator was crowded. Gordon wouldn't be suspicious, not with Evanhurst in Washington, not with secret business that must be completed before the opening tomorrow. Hugo might not be here. Gordon might call the police; Schern or Brecklein might attack. Piers had no weapon. What he did have was stronger than weapons; his knowledge against their desire for knowledge. They wanted it yet; orders to bring him in wouldn't have been given otherwise. A bullet in the dark would have been a quicker solution.

He knocked on the suite door. Gordon himself opened it. He frowned, "I didn't expect you."

Piers pushed in. "I'm Watkins."

They were there, still at the betrothal table. And they were motionless while he looked them over one by one. Bianca, the happiness fading from her young face under his study; Hugo, accentuating his malicious arrogance with lifted eyeglass; Morgen, more beautiful than the red roses on her breast, more treacherous than the scent of bitter almonds. The older men must have gone with Evanhurst to Washington.

"Close the door," Piers told Gordon.

Disturbed, he did as he was bid. "I don't understand."

"You will." He gestured Gordon back to the others. "I'm before time again, Morgen," he said. He took the newspaper from his pocket. "But I thought I'd best have a private talk with Hugo before business. I've escaped from Cassidy just now for one reason, to ask if this is true."

Hugo took Bianca's hand. "Certainly it's true. Aren't you going to congratulate me?"

"No, I'm not. I have no intention of allowing you to get away with it."

Gordon's shoulders broadened. "I'm afraid I must ask you to leave, Piers."

"You sit down." He didn't raise his voice. "You don't know any more than Bianca does what this is all about. You poor insular fool."

Hugo was on his feet now and the glass dropped from his eye. "What are you attempting to say?"

"I'm saying it. You aren't going to sacrifice Secretary Anstruther's daughter for the Fatherland. If she and Gordon weren't a couple of children they'd see what you are."

"And what is that?" The ice over his words was brittle.

Piers said, "I don't believe you wish me to answer that . . . here." He looked from Hugo to Morgen and again at Hugo.

Bianca rushed beside Hugo now, her hand under his arm. She said, "I don't know what kind of madman you are bursting in here. Your impudence is only exceeded by your stupidity."

He asked brutally, "Do you know what von Eynar wants with you?"

Her lips spattered scorn.

"Don't get the idea it's because you're round and young and warm that he'll marry you. I won't say that doesn't count with Hugo but that isn't enough. He's had better than you."

A gust of anger bruised her. "How dare you say such things?" She turned to Gordon frantically, "Witt, can't you do something?"

Piers blocked both the telephone table and the door. "He can't. Once he was strong enough but not now." His hands closed over the back of a chair and he set it purposefully in front of him. "Not since he became Hugo's pimp."

The rage leapt in Gordon, and Piers lifted the chair slightly.

Bianca was white as pearl. "Hugo is my fiancé."

"Yesterday it was Witt. Tomorrow?"

"We are to be married tomorrow." She thrust it at him.

Piers' mouth twisted at Hugo. "No time to waste, is there? The Secretary just might return before the Conclave. He couldn't very well move against his daughter's husband." He turned on the girl. "Couldn't you see that? Don't you know you're just a small pawn in Germany's game?"

She moved closer to Hugo. He didn't sense

her. He was watching Piers, waiting.

Morgen spoke gently, almost with casualness. "More melodrama, Piers?"

HE MOVED his eyes on her. She hadn't stirred from the chair. She alone here didn't fear or hate him because she alone didn't care. He looked at her and the want and hate of her twisted in his heart. He asked, "Have you an answer for me yet, Morgen?" He put his eyes hard on Gordon as if Gordon didn't know. "I opened the bidding today on the Anstruther papers."

Bianca's cry was strangled.

Gordon said, "You can't do that, Piers. They belong to me now."

"I can do it," Piers said. "Because you can't get at them without playing dice with me. You double-crossed me. Bound me to secrecy and then ran fast to the chief. You knew how to step into Anstruther's shoes, didn't you? You didn't realize that you wouldn't know how to fill them. If you were that big, you wouldn't have to hold the tin cup for the von Eynars. You wouldn't need to throw Bianca to the beasts."

Morgen said, "Don't be absurd, Piers." She was untouched. "Because Bianca and Witt made a normal mistake—"

"It's Gordon who made the mistake, dear. He thought you could help him. He believed you when you told him that once he held the nominal power of the Secretary, he could discount me. I could be forced to turn over to him my information. By the way, Gordon, has Nickerson cabled you that the office was broken into and all papers pertaining to my work stolen? Sad. More so because there was nothing in the files concerning our present problems."

"You see, I've worked before against Schern. I knew the need of precaution." He smiled. "Won't you sit down, Bianca? You look so tired standing there. You too, Hugo. Gordon? This will take a little time."

No one moved.

He shrugged. "Well, Morgen, how much was I bid for Secretary Anstruther's papers?"

I have them, you know. You've known that all along, haven't you? Ever since the Arab who switched the dispatch cases reported to you. I'm afraid I broke his wrist. But so stupid for him to tell me it wasn't Anstruther's case when I could see the initials—three faded gold initials, Ulysses Samuel Anstruther. The next man you hire should be warned to respect those initials."

Bianca breathed, "You killed my father."

He paid no attention to her incoherency. Her reason had been corrupted by von Eynar. "Was my price met, Morgen? Or did they attempt to cut it. A directorship in German Airways, Inc.? I'm certain Brecklein wouldn't hesitate to offer that. Particularly since an accident so easily can occur in the line of duty."

"A million gold? Schern would think of that; he has always believed money could buy any man. After the man is corrupted, it is simple enough to get back the gold. What did Hugo offer? But of course. He has only one thing of value to offer—you."

"You are insufferable," Hugo said.

"Did you agree to offer Morgen? I'll admit that is beyond value. And tempting. Easy enough to get her back, too. You need only to kill me and beckon."

Gordon's face was mottled.

"The trouble is I don't want any substitutes. Not even you, Morgen." Only with his blood and nerves and sinews. "Like to hear what it is I want, Gordon?"

"I don't know why we put up with this," Hugo said.

Piers knew then that he was armed. The flex of his right hand, the threat on his mouth. Gordon wasn't. But Gordon was taunted beyond reason. His speech was thick. "I don't care what you want."

Morgen commanded, "Let him speak." The men were held in check. "Tell them what it is you asked."

He smiled at her. "It isn't much, is it, my dear?" He moved his eyes to Gordon. "I want Gordon's head. I want to ruin Gordon."

[Turn page]

Can't Keep Grandma In Her Chair

She's as Lively as a Youngster—Now her Backache is better

Many sufferers relieve nagging backache quickly, once they discover that the real cause of their trouble may be tired kidneys.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking the excess acids and waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

When disorder of kidney function permits poisonous matter to remain in your blood, it may cause nagging backache, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up

nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from your blood. Get Doan's Pills.

(Adv.)

Bianca cried out, "That's why you killed my father! Because you wanted to be Secretary."

He said gently, "But I didn't kill him, Bianca. The man who killed him was a friend of Hugo's. They were in the Luftwaffe together."

Bianca cried, "Stop him, Hugo."

Hugo spoke with impatience. "Be quiet, Bibi. What do his lies matter? I haven't seen Gundar in twelve years."

"You understand? Hugo names him, not I. Your father was shot in the back, Bianca, by Hugo's friend." He watched the horror eating her away. He said with tight throat, "I didn't want you to know, not this way. But it's the least I can do for a man I loved. Protect the thing he loved best. I wouldn't want to see you after a year with Hugo."

Bianca faded into the chair. She put her head on her arms. No one paid any attention to her. Morgen was on her feet now. The men started forward.

Piers said sharply, "Don't come any nearer. You don't want to harm me, not until you have the papers. Even if I am gone, they still can speak."

MORGEN demanded, "What happened to the Secretary? You know?"

"That's the one thing has kept you from killing me, isn't it? Your fear that the Secretary might return. Because Gundar Abersohn never came back with his report. He couldn't come back, you see. He's dead too. It's strange you didn't find the graves."

Hugo said, "There were no graves. Only the wreckage of a plane. But no humans had perished in the fire."

He didn't understand. The jackals . . . His jaw trembled. "I didn't come to remember what is past. I came to see if my price is to be met. Where is Schern? We must finish this now. Cassidy might catch up with me before tomorrow."

Morgen and Hugo moved together. He knew what their eyes said. He shook his head. "No, it isn't safe to eliminate me even now, now that you know Anstruther is dead. Because I've another card up my sleeve. I have your letters, Hugo. The ones concerning the border incidents."

He watched the import of it strike them.

"It wouldn't be wise to eliminate me until you have them, would it?" He smiled. "I'll be more generous than you would be. I'll give up the Anstruther memoranda and the letters in exchange for Gordon's head."

Gordon's head was moving from side to side as if the thread-hung Damoclean sword glittered above it.

Hugo said, "We must talk with Schern. He's in Washington."

"There isn't much time," Piers reminded him. "Only tonight. Tomorrow—if I read

in the papers tomorrow that by Presidential order I am to preside at the Conclave until Secretary Anstruther arrives, you will receive both sets of papers."

"Do you think we'd trust you?" Morgen stood motionless.

"No more than I trust you. I won't give you my hand on the bargain. I prefer you where you are. But when I read that notice, I will allow Morgen to carry to you the papers. Come on, Morgen."

Her eyes widened.

"You didn't think I'd leave without a hostage? Morgen goes with me."

Gordon broke out of numbness. "No!"

"If there's any difficulty," Piers continued easily, "she will die. Neither of you gentlemen wishes harm to come to Morgen. That is why I take her. You didn't know, Gordon, that she isn't Hugo's sister? Once she was his wife. Naturally you haven't been told. I doubt even that Schern knows. I learned by accident—years ago." His eyes warned. "I would advise you to allow us to leave in peace. Peace." The laughter died in his mouth. "Do you remember when we believed that we could hold the world in peace? Tomorrow by high noon I must know. Morgen—"

She went to an inner door. "My wrap—"

"No. I don't trust you out of sight, my darling. The night will keep you warm."

"Don't go with him, Morn." Gordon tried to catch her arm. "He can't hurt me. We can handle him. We have all the powers of my government behind me."

"You don't have the papers," Piers said softly. "You don't have the word that will keep Germany under protectorate for fifty years."

"It isn't important." Gordon held her. "He can't do anything. He isn't Anstruther."

"You don't have the letters that will put Hugo in the International Court."

Hugo spoke coldly, "Go Morgen."

Gordon said, "You mustn't!" while she moved, her gallant head high, with her mouth smiling, her eyes cloaked in silence. She went to Piers and she said, "I am ready."

He opened the door, still watching the others. He smiled. "Don't send after me. I'd hate any harm to come to Morgen. I, too, have loved her."

2.

MORGEN asked, "Where are we going?" The wind blew in her hair and across her uncovered shoulders.

"I don't know." Only now when they were on the street, did he know fear again. It had been a foolhardy adventure, no more, for of what use was a deed for a man who was dead, who could never know? The girl wasn't worth it. "I don't know where to go."

"You're not safe on the street," she said.

"I'm not safe anywhere." He had no will to fight at the moment. The semi-darkness of Madison was retreat, and the silence of Morgen. But behind them in the darkness the hunters padded, a moon-faced German, a dark bushman. Tonight Cassidy wasn't standing between him and death.

"Ernst won't be back from Washington until tomorrow. We can double back. My rooms will be safe."

His savage laughter was his answer. And they walked on.

She asked, "What was the reason for all that mumbo jumbo at Witt's?" Scorn was staccato. "You don't care about that girl."

"No, I don't care about that girl."

"Why walk with danger? Did you believe I'd actually arrange your fantastic meeting?"

"Have I changed that much?"

She searched his face. "No. You've changed very little. That's why I don't understand how it is you came tonight."

"You sold me out to Witt."

"No."

"To the commissioner. Why?"

She said, "To get the papers. You knew I would."

"Did you think Gordon would turn them over to you?"

Her voice was sweet as bells. "He had no choice."

He caught her shoulders. "What do you mean?"

"Don't you know what I mean? That is his part of the bargain." Her eyes dared his. He knew what she could mean, Gordon a deliberate traitor, not an addled fool. He also knew her dishonesty. He walked on again.

"I offered you the papers. For a right price. You didn't need to sell me out."

She said, "You had no intentions ever of giving up the papers to us."

He said nothing.

"Did you?"

"Not ever," he told her flatly.

"Why did you pretend? Did you think I would believe you?"

This was the last night. There were but two alternatives for tomorrow, success or failure, peace or war. It didn't matter what he told her now. "I wanted to get at Gordon. There was only one way, through you. The man is armored; he has always been. I never knew there was a weak link until I saw him look at you, that night in my room. I didn't want a strong Gordon tomorrow. I must be present at the Conclave; I must speak."

But it had been a mistake to make the final gesture, to take her away from them. He wished to God he hadn't. It had strengthened them, weakened himself. Fear alone had prompted it, fear that without her he

would not leave that room alive.

Now his brain had clarified. David must come tonight in answer to his personal; there was only tonight. She couldn't be in on the meeting with David. He must get rid of her.

She was silent, only their steps were heard, drum beats, heart beats on the night. And she said suddenly, "I don't care what they decide. I'll give you Gordon."

He waited, "What price now?"

"Those letters Hugo wrote."

He saw then he couldn't be rid of her easily; she would remain with him until she had those letters. She knew what was in them. Unless he could escape her. And with all of his knowledge and his hatred, the sickness of jealousy pitted him. He taunted. "Not the Anstruther papers?"

"I don't care about them now."

When it came to the final reckoning Hugo alone mattered to her. The schemes of Schern and Brecklein, the Fatherland, all lost importance when Hugo's self was threatened. Or perhaps it was that she knew that Piers wasn't going to be allowed to produce the Anstruther memoranda at the conference.

She had been wrong once before. It might be that knowledge which made her less sure of the Hugo letters also being obliterated. She couldn't take the chance because if they were given, they were a death warrant for her lover. And although it started again the internal bleeding, it was because of this quality, this humanness, that he had loved her. Because she too could love, even if it were not he who was loved.

But his mouth was cruel. "And Gordon goes the way of all the others. The Baal Hugo hungers again."

She kept her face ahead. "Will you trade?"

"Give him to me."

"First those letters."

WITHOUT halting, he put his hand against the coolness of her hair, turned her head. "Even now, when it is needful you trust, you don't trust me."

"No."

They moved on. He was suddenly harsh. "You know the contents of those letters. You know they would convict Hugo of instigating war. With the implication of connivance in the Secretary's death."

She said, "Hugo had nothing to do with the death."

"It was you?"

"No." This time her steps halted. "Give me the letters. I'll give you the plot against Anstruther."

"Could you?" He laughed down into her face. "It's too late. I have myself to think of. I must have Gordon. We'll wait for tomorrow."

The shadow of a tree fell across her eyes. One tree by an old brick wall.

He laughed again. "You think I'll be dead tomorrow."

She stood there looking up at him.

"Would you grieve, Morgen?" He shook his head. "I should grieve if you were to die. You are too beautiful to die." He put his hands on her face, pushing away her hair. "Strange that evil can be so beautiful."

She whispered, "I think you are mad."

"No. I'm terribly sane. Only a man as sane as I knows that no price is too great to pay for peace. No one's death is important for peace."

Her voice was still mute. "Did you take me away to kill me?"

"No, dearest. Your death wouldn't help peace. If it would, I shouldn't hesitate. But I must warn you, too many have died through me—without my wish. It isn't wise that you should be with me tonight." His eyes held hers. "What is your part to be in the New Germany?"

"I have no part."

"Only to be behind Hugo. And his part?"

She closed her eyes. The lashes were dark on her shadowed cheeks.

"You might as well tell me." He taunted, "After all I won't be here to see it. Will I?"

She opened her eyes then. They were proud. "Hugo is the new leader. The Führer whom every man will follow. No maniacal Austrian this time. Germany triumphant in the new Siegfried." There was fanatical pride shining out of her face.

He stepped away from her. The enormity of their madness staggered him. The pattern had been used before with such near perfection; it could be consummated. The Germans had hungered for a leader. Hitler had failed them. Hugo wouldn't.

He said, "No." The decision of an avenging god must have been in him. She made a sound of fear. "Will you give me Witt Gordon's head now, Morgen? Not for any scraps of paper. Because with it I can preserve peace. And in preserving peace I preserve Hugo. If tomorrow is the end of peace he must die."

Courage was flowing into her. "First the letters."

"They aren't in my pockets." He walked on and she followed. "I carry danger with me but not the dangerous."

She said, "I'm tired. If you won't come to my room, why don't we go to yours?"

"Aren't you being obvious, Morgen? My room has been searched, doubly searched."

"Before you took the letters."

"How do you know?"

"Because I know you didn't have them until Wednesday night, the night you entered the Peace office."

"Under the nose of Uncle Johann

Schmidt," he grimaced. "But you didn't know anything important was missing. No, darling, we won't go to my rooms. Too many outstretched arms are awaiting me there."

"There are ways to enter without anyone seeing."

"You know that?" he smiled.

"There are certain to be ways. You want Gordon." She caught his arm. "I can't walk all night. You'll have to decide something."

His eyes dropped to her slippers, twists of colored silk coiled on stilted golden heels. "We'll have a drink and decide." He took her arm and pushed her forward.

The place was down at the heels and the eyes of the too few customers were resentful of her exquisiteness. Piers didn't care. He propelled her to the back of the long bar. "Champagne or absinthe, beloved?"

She looked across at the bartender. Piers was afraid then she meant to speak, to give him over. He had forgotten that he was wanted.

But she didn't betray him. She said, "I'll take what you wish, Piers."

He ordered, "Two brandies." The liquor burned him. He looked at Morgen, the way her hair lay against her cheek, the way red roses scented her breast. He didn't want a hostage. He wanted only somewhere to lay his head. He put his hand against her arm. "You'd best go back to Hugo."

"No," she said.

He struck, "He doesn't want you empty-handed."

Her face held the beauty of a beloved. "He wants me any way I come to him."

The truth seared him and he said angrily to the bartender, "Another brandy." He swallowed it in one draught.

She said, "Have you decided where we go?"

It came to him then, that simply. How to hold the hostage and to escape her. His eyes narrowed. "He wants you but you won't go empty-handed, is that it?"

She was silent.

He smiled at her. "If you'll take me to Fabian, I'll give you the letters."

HER mouth was small with anger. "I don't know where he is. No one knows. Not even Gordon."

"I'd be safe there. No one knows."

She put down her glass. "We can't continue like this. I'll go wherever you say."

He lifted her fingers, turned her hand and touched the palm. "Devotion. Moving, isn't it?"

She said, "Call a cab, Piers. We can't stay here."

He smiled at her. "Yes." She had made the suggestion. Call a cab. Call Willie. He took the card from his pocket. "I'll do that, dear one. I even know where we'll be safe. With a murderer. But you won't mind that."

Piers would leave her safe with Willie. He wouldn't be stricken until they had Morgen again.

He walked to the phone booth at the front of the room. He didn't touch the handle of the door. He had glimpsed outside the pane the round shadowy face of the German hireling. Anger shot into him; now that he had made his plans he wouldn't have them thwarted by the follower. He strode to the door. He heard Morgen calling after him, "Piers—wait—"

Piers ran, he caught the coatsleeve, swung the dumpy figure about. The moon face stammered with sudden fright. Piers said, "Sorry. I don't want you tonight." He drew back his fist and he thudded it against the jaw. The man fell heavily. His head broke against the curb.

"Piers!" She screamed it now.

He said bitterly, "I suppose he has a weak heart." The man lay without motion.

"Piers!"

From the bar doorway, the curious were emerging. He had to let her go, to take his chances alone. There was nothing else to do. If the police took him, he would never see Fabian or peace. He turned her to him. "I can't carry you further. Not now. Don't try to follow me. Good-by, Morgen." He kissed her and then ran crazily into the dark side street with her screaming and the sudden shouts of the bystanders after him.

He ran faster than they could run. He couldn't have retraced his path, ducking, twisting, lurking, cutting back. He didn't know the block where he found a subway kiosk; it was somewhere on Lexington. He felt the breath of pursuit as he clattered down the steps, fumbled for a nickel, and pushed past the turnstile just in time to catch the train roaring in. But the stairs and platform were empty when the train jerked out again.

When the Sixties appeared he knew it was a down-town subway. His breath began to modulate and he straightened his tie and coatsleeve. He'd lost his hat when he ran. It didn't matter. She'd give his name to the police when they came but they already had the name. He wondered if the uncle of Johann Schmidt actually had a weak heart. He wondered if he had held the power of death again in his hand.

He left the train at Grand Central and shuttled to Times Square. When he emerged to the street, Broadway was as untouched, as beautiful and garish and heartless as always. She didn't know the battle being waged on her doorstep against one of her children; if she knew she wouldn't care. She had too many children to care about one. She would know nothing until the bombs fell again.

He walked on the opposite side from the Astor. He lifted his eyes to the fifth floor window, that center window. He thought there was a shadow but he didn't know. He

couldn't enter through the lobby; Cassidy had warned him not to be seen again tonight. It wouldn't be Cassidy alone after him now; the call would have gone out to the department from Gordon as soon as he left the Waldorf. They weren't afraid of him. Not now with Anstruther known dead.

Morgen knew a way in not through the lobby. So did he, if no guards were on the door. Now that he had run from Morgen the want of her was in him again. He could have had her with him this night, for comfort against the cold of tomorrow. Despair was fogging him anew. There was no way that his voice could be heard tomorrow, not without Fabian. Fabian must speak for him. David would come. The Africans too knew it was the last night; they must have seen his message by now.

He circled to the service entrance and he hesitated. But he couldn't hesitate; he must go on. He went inside; he wasn't challenged. He climbed the stairs until the count said the fifth floor. He had miscalculated. He descended one flight, went still unchallenged to his own door. He put in the key and opened it. Only when he stood in the open doorway did it occur to him that he might have been shot down as he entered, that the enemy could have been waiting here. It was then he saw in the half-darkness the figure against the far wall.

"David." Unbelieving, he uttered his relief.

"Come in quietly and close the door." Hugo's voice was stone. "I am waiting. You are covered by my gun."

Piers closed the door and he stood there while the lights lifted, bright and red and blue. He saw the blunt barrel of the automatic, the protuberance of a silencer within it. He didn't move. "Why are you here?"

"Those letters. You will give them to me."

He took his time. "You offer me my life in exchange?"

"I offer you nothing. I have come for those letters."

Piers asked mildly, "If these were so important, why were they kept in open files?"

Hugo said, "They were harmless unless you should read them. You who know too much."

"Too much to live?"

"Exactly."

Piers took a breath. "I don't intend to die."

HUGO'S mouth was scornful.

"I don't think I will die until you know what I have done with Morgen."

The immobility was shaken. "Morgen—" He brazened. "She led you here and she escaped. You are bluffing."

That had been the plan, not for her to get the letters from him but to lead him to Hugo. And if she couldn't lead Piers there—but she

knew and Hugo knew he would return here tonight. They had seen and understood the message to David. They would even know David; with them nothing was left to chance.

Piers shrugged. "Then kill me. You aren't going to get the letters yet."

Hugo's voice chunked the words. "Where is Morgen?"

"She is safe." He asked lightly, "How did you get into this room?"

"Where is Morgen?"

"You don't believe that she is safe for the present? Why don't you search for her? Or is that beneath the dignity of the new Führer?"

Hugo hardened. "You have found that out."

"Morgen told me. We are old friends, you remember? What did you and Bianca decide?"

Hugo asked, "Why did Morgen tell you?"

His voice was soft. "I persuaded her, shall we say?"

The lights showed the labor of Hugo's mind. "If you have injured her—"

"Injured Morgen? I who saved her from the International Judgment?"

He said harshly, "That you might deal in your own fashion."

"Vengeance is the Lord's, Hugo. If I had wanted it, could I not have carried it out long ago?"

"Not as now. Now when we are ready for fulfillment. Morgen has worked for this—that I may ascend my rightful place."

"Don't say too much," Piers warned.

"Why not? You won't repeat this. You have been discredited. The United States Government is seeking you. The man who killed Anstruther, stole his papers for his own use."

Piers was fired with rage. He didn't care about the gun; he was a man of peace but he would have killed Hugo at this moment with his bare hands had Hugo been Gordon. His fists tightened but he spoke quietly. "You're saying a lot of words, Hugo. We call it whistling in the dark." Hugo wasn't going to kill him. He was to live to settle with Gordon. "You don't have the Anstruther papers. You don't have the African letters." His mouth twisted. "You don't have Morgen."

Had he, Piers, been armed, he could have winged him then. The man was off guard. Piers pressed on. "You are easily taken in, you new Germans. Just as were the old. Do you remember the Russian campaign? You've believed that Gordon was discrediting me. You haven't looked deeper. You haven't considered that we could play a game to discredit you."

Hugo's smile was confident. "Gordon is our man, Piers. We didn't have to convince him; he came to us three years ago in Rio.

He planned Anstruther's death, not us."

Piers knew Hugo lied. He'd listened to German lies so often. Gordon was their man, yes, but out of passion and ignorance. Pier's lip curled, "You put guilt on him for the plan, on me for the fulfillment?" He shook his head. His suggestion was mendacious as Hugo's own.

"I know Schern's treacherous touch too well for that, Hugo. You think the police are after me because Gordon told you that? It has never occurred to you that they were put on me to protect me? That this room is under constant surveillance? That Cassidy will be up here soon to make his regular check? Then what will you do, Hugo? If something has happened to me, you will face the law."

Doubt riddled Hugo. It wouldn't have shaken Schern but Hugo wasn't a diplomat, he was a decoration. He spoke with anger out of his unsureness. "I want those letters."

"After you have them, you will kill me?"

The mask of the beast was over his face.

"Turn out your pockets."

"They aren't on me."

"Turn them out."

"You're not afraid I'll pull a gun?"

Hugo said, "We know you do not carry a gun." There was no doubt that the dossier was definite.

Piers shrugged. He emptied his pockets on the bedspread. He did it slowly, spreading out the scant display, opening the bill-fold to show its innocence. He even laid the key-ring there—with such a number of keys Hugo could not recognize an important one. "Nothing, you see."

Hugo walked to them, the gun still pointed. He touched them apart. "Where are the letters?"

Piers was silent.

Hugo lifted the gun and he struck Piers across the mouth with it. Piers tasted blood and helpless fury.

Hugo repeated without inflection, "Where are they?"

He said bitterly, "Where you will never lay hands on them." He added, "No matter what you do."

Hugo's mouth smiled but his eyes were inhuman. He said, "You've had your chance. Morgen didn't want you to die. Not for any reason you think. Because she thought I might be involved. But no one saw me enter this room. I know because I was covered when I came in. No one will know who killed you."

For the first time the reality smote Piers; he was to die. He was to stand here and die. And with him would die the hope for peace.

"I have a silencer. I know you are not protected by the police; I know Gordon better than you. If you did pass the letters

to someone else, I'll let Schern take care of that. Without your word to corroborate them, they won't be of much use. I don't believe they'll be any danger with you out of the way."

Piers drew forth again the weapon he'd counted on, his last chance. "You may kill me, yes, and what about Morgen?"

AGAIN there was the faintest hesitation. And in the silence from his stand near the door, Piers heard the elevator doors open, heard the footsteps approaching his room. David now, too late. And quickly he knew he was wrong; David did not walk with sound. It was the police. He couldn't escape the law now; he could escape death. He smiled.

Hugo didn't understand the smile. He raged, "You're lying about Morgen, too. You wouldn't have hurt Morgen, she means too much for you."

"One thing I wasn't lying about," Piers said. "The police detective is coming to this door right now."

Hugo backed into deeper shadow.

"You can't kill me, not and get away with it. It's too late now, Hugo. He'll take me. The government will have the letters before tomorrow."

Hugo's mouth moved. "Stand away from that door. Let him come in."

He realized with sudden horror what Hugo meant to do. Only the beast was there; another killing meant nothing. And as he realized he suddenly recognized the steps. They were not those of a man. The rap sounded.

"Stand away. And say nothing."

His throat was dry. "You can't do it. You won't get away with it. It's murder."

"Quiet."

"The law will take you." The sweat stood on his temples, in his eyes. "You can't escape no matter what you do. You can't lie to Cassidy—he doesn't like Germans." He was pushing, pushing the man to the brink of fear, of self control. His teeth cut into his broken mouth. "I'll live and I'll have the letters. You've lost. Put away the gun."

Hugo's word was a snarl. "Quiet."

He heard the pass key in the lock, the knob turning. The lights from Broadway faded. That alone he couldn't plan. As the door swung open in the darkness, Hugo fired the silenced shot. She walked into it, kept walking.

Hugo's face was raw. "Morgen!" The lights came up. He cried it, "Morgen!"

She crumpled and she lay there, moving, but without movement. Piers closed the door. He saw the gun where it had fallen from Hugo's hand but he didn't move. Hugo stumbled forward, knelt to her.

Piers' throat closed. "Don't touch her!"

Hugo didn't hear. Piers circled to the gleam on the rug. He picked it up and

pointed it at the man. There was agony beneath the numbness. He repeated, "Don't touch her!"

Hugo raised his head. His empty eyes saw Piers.

"You killed her." His voice was livid as a wound. "You killed her!" He came to his feet. "You knew she was there."

Piers said, "It was her life or mine. Mine was more important." The smile was terrible on his face. "She died for you. And you will die for her, for murdering her."

Hugo's voice was without feeling. "I hate you. I've hated you since the days of Berlin. You and your arrogant righteousness, while you were signaling the bombs to destroy my country. I wanted to kill you the first night I met you. Morgen wouldn't let me. She liked your pretty face."

"She loved me," Piers said. He was trying to understand. "It wasn't something she could explain. But she loved me. The way she might have loved the good if she'd ever had a chance to know it."

Hugo moved as in a dream. "I'm going to kill you."

Piers said quietly, "I have your gun."

"You killed Morgen. I'll kill you." He was whispering it, like one mad, and he kept moving.

Piers held the gun steady and then willfully he thrust it away. He didn't want Hugo to die. He wanted him to be destroyed and to live, to live as he, Piers, would live and grieve. He needed no arms with which to battle Hugo; it must be tooth and claw alone.

As for himself, he knew now he was not to die. He had the gift of death for others, not for himself. The gift he had borne to Anstruther, to a nameless man on Broadway, in full knowledge to Morgen. The hate in him matched the hate in Hugo as they met. The lights faded, the lights glittered, with the unendurable ceaseless rhythm of a heart, of the cosmos. She lay white and silent, not seeing the beasts that tore at each other, because she was dead. This was jungle, only jungle ways were valid.

There was fresh blood in Piers' mouth, the blood of his enemy wetted his thumbs. They fell, beating, scraping at each other. And in the heat Piers saw her face, the stillness of it, the desolation on her mouth, the stain spreading below the roses on her breast. All of his judgment on the man who had forced him to destroy her went into that last blow. Hugo was still.

Piers' breath jerked. He rose unsteadily. He rasped, "Get up."

Hugo lay quiet. Another weak heart? He stirred the body with his toe. "Get up. Finish it."

Hugo didn't move. Piers took out his handkerchief, wiped at the blood on his face. He didn't see the quick grasping movement. He heard the report of the silenced gun and the sting in his shoulder. He fell on Hugo

before he could fire again and he broke the gun out of the man's hand. He didn't use it. His fists beat the final blows.

Hugo twitched and was still. This time he wouldn't move. Piers swayed to his feet again. He looked at the gun in his hand. Mechanically he broke it, removed the shells. He didn't want to be shot in the back. He didn't trust Hugo von Eynar even when he lay unconscious. Piers dropped the empty gun beside Hugo's hand. His own prints covered it, his and Hugo's. It didn't matter now. If Germany won tomorrow, nothing mattered. If they lost, his truth of tonight would be accepted. He wiped his mouth again and he walked to the door.

He didn't look at Morgen.

3.

HE WALKED without seeing to the service stairway and he started down. Slowly, as a man dreaming, one step, two, and then he heard and he was frozen there listening. Footsteps ascending, the heavy footsteps of heavy men, the police! Someone had seen him enter, summoned them.

He whirled and he fled upward, softly as a fox runs, up, up until he was in the sky ballroom not yet open for the season. He forced open a door, closed it quietly after him, and he ran to the very edge of the roof, flinging himself flat in the deep shadow of a cornice. Not too soon for the lights came on in the deserted ballroom and he heard the words spoken.

"—so the service elevator's got to go on the blink when we got to finish the wiring tonight. So what do they care if we walk up. They're going to open the roof tomorrow on account of the Peace delegates—"

Withheld breath quivered from Piers. He didn't know how long he lay there while the men within hammered and thumped. After the lights were out and they went away, he lay longer. When he stood his frame ached and his head was light. Blood had caked in his hand.

He stood dark against the Broadway sky, a dwarfed figure high above the theater-bright streets. No one looked up. Not to stars, not to danger in the skies. The faces were set to the dear familiar things, the expected things. He moved unsteadily across the roof seeking a fire escape. There was none. He had to go through the hotel again.

He shut away thinking as he entered the dark ballroom and began his long descent to escape. With his appearance he dared not to take the elevator. He didn't hurry until the last flight and he turned his face from the workmen in the doorway. His arm scraped against the door as he pushed out into the street and he felt the trickle of blood again down his sleeve. He skirted through

Shubert Alley, walked across to Eighth Avenue, south to 40th before doubling back to the subway entrance.

In the grimy mirror of a gum vending machine, he saw himself. His mouth was swollen, discoloration marred his narrow face, his hair was torn. He smoothed the hair; there was little more he could do. His arm throbbed, blood was veining his left wrist into his palm. He held the arm close to him as he made his way to a phone booth in the underground. There could be detectives waiting for him.

He called the number Willie had given. There was no one else from whom he could seek help. He had known he wouldn't reach a cabbie at this hour of Broadway glory. Yet he had hoped. There must be a hole where he could hide until morning.

The voice at the other end of the wire said, "Well, make up your mind. You want I should tell him to call you back or don't you?"

Piers said faintly, "Where can I wait for him? How can I find him?"

"Wyncha say so before?" The voice was disgust. "If you want to see him tonight you better come up to the garage here. He'll be in sometime."

Piers repeated the address, in the West 50's, between Ninth and Tenth avenues. He climbed the stairs to the street, the 40th street exit. He turned his face again to Broadway. The pain in his arm was enervating and his steps lagged into the brightness.

He moved through the crowds as in a long dream. He faltered at the Astor, turning his head hungrily at the steps. Within the doorway there was the movement of beautiful women and expensive men. He was a beggar outside the gates. He could smell the luxury within, the luxury of plenty and of peace. No one knew that beauty had been slain above their heads, that peace and plenty might yet be doomed.

He walked on. Beneath the percussion of the street there crept the soft relentless sound of his pursuers. He couldn't get away. If one step was silenced another caught up the sound. Follow, follow . . . But he wasn't to die. He was to live. To defeat ape that Man might live. He was to live to remember Morgen. The whole fabric of the world is empty. It must remain empty for the eternity of life. Fate is inevitable. Ubi sunt . . . ?

He hesitated at 49th and he leaned against the wall of the building there for a moment of strength. He dragged across the street in time to board the crosstown bus. At Ninth avenue he descended. Fear enveloped him as he stood alone there, in the desert darkness, in the silence. There were blocks he must cover to reach the garage, haunted, knowing death followed. He moved only because he must move; he must run from death until was accomplished what he had

come to accomplish.

He kept close to the wall, feeling his way forward, not daring look back to see what might breathe against his neck. He was wet with weakness but his fear moved him, one block, another, down the endless tunnel of loneliness and shadow. He watched cautiously the intersections until he saw the dark bulk of the garage half way down and across the block. He fled towards it, moving too fast now, breaking into a half run as he covered the dark street. Up three steps, and he stumbled through the open door.

A small light burned in the dingy office. There were three men there, three mongrel men. Piers tried to speak but his throat was closed.

The man with grease smudged on his stubbled chin demanded, "Whatcha want?"

Piers recognized the voice of the phone. He could speak now if hoarsely. "I want Willie."

"You the guy what called him up?"

He nodded and he put his back against the wall to steady himself. He saw a man pass the open door, disappear into the dark beyond. He began to tremble.

THE smallest man with a cab-driver's cap hung over his crumpled ear rolled towards him. "Looks like you got trouble."

His speech came with difficulty. "Willie said—if trouble—come to him."

"Jeeze, he's shot!" the second cabbie said sharply.

"Nothing." He let them put him in the scarred wooden chair away from that open door. "A scratch."

The boss said, "We don't want no trouble with the cops, Mister."

"What's the matter with you, Bull?" the first cabbie demanded. "He's a friend of Willie's."

"It isn't the cops," Piers said.

"How do we know, Jack?" Bull demanded of the first cabbie in return. "We don't want no trouble."

Piers found the dirty card. "Willie gave me this."

The three examined it.

"I'm all right." As long as he was out of the dark, safe with other men, "I could use a drink. And some food. I'm hungry, that's all." Dinner seemed dreams away. He brought two tens out of his pocket. "Any place around you could get me some food and a bottle of brandy?"

Jack took the money and he went out whistling. Piers didn't know if he'd return with the police or not. If so he would have to be taken; he hadn't the strength to move.

Bull was still dubious. "You better wash your face. If the cops should be hanging around—Sammy, you show him."

Piers' head was light as he felt his way after Sammy to the miserly washroom. He

splashed his face. His left arm was too stiff to move it but he washed away the blood from his hand and wrist as he could. Sammy led him back to the room. He sat down in the chair furthest from the door.

Sammy's curious eyes, Bull's suspicion watched him. He didn't care. He sat there silent until Jack returned. The little cabman had a bucket of coffee in his hand and a sack of hamburgers. From his back pocket he took a bottle of brandy. The change clinked on the table. "There you are, Mister." Piers opened the bottle, took a stiff slug. He passed it to the next man. He began to eat hungrily. He spoke through a mouthful, "Help yourselves. This is all I needed. I'll be all right. Willie's sure to come in?"

Bull wiped the mouth of the bottle with his forearm. "He'll be here. Maybe two o'clock—three—"

It wasn't yet one o'clock. Piers ate the second hamburger more slowly. Sanity was returning to him and courage.

Jack grinned through a bite. "How does the other guy look?"

Piers said solemnly, "I should have killed him. He tried to kill me." Death was too good for Hugo. He should suffer torment worse than death.

"What was the trouble? A woman?" The curiosity was idle.

"Yes." He cried it from the depths, "Yes. He killed her." And I killed her. She whom we loved, we have slain.

Bull's lip jutted out and he stood tall. "I told you we don't want to get mixed up in no trouble with the cops. Killing's trouble." His head jerked to the door.

Piers' fingers gripped the warped table. He spoke from his desperate need. "You can't put me out now. Willie told me to come here. He's the only one I can trust to help me. I must have help. This man is a killer."

"We don't want no Valentine massacres here." Bull's neck muscles were dark and thick. "Sorry, Mister."

Sammy squeaked as if a gun covered the room. "We'll tell Willie where to meet you. Where?"

"I have no place to go." Grayness ate into his face. "Only to death. I can't die, not yet."

Sammy's hand described what might have been a cross. Bull stood, an unyielding mass. Jack said, chewing, "Why not wait till Willie shows up?"

"You shut your face," Bull threatened. "I'm not having no cops here."

Piers made a last hopeless try. "Do you know who Secretary Anstruther is?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Do you?" he insisted.

"Who don't?" Bull said. "He's Secretary of Peace."

Piers spoke carefully, as to a child. "The man who attempted to kill me tonight, who

will if he can kill me before tomorrow, is the man who murdered Secretary Anstruther."

The three faces turned to him with something like fear, fear of his madness. He met their eyes and then anger rose in him at their open rejection of his word. He demanded, "Do you want peace?"

"We got peace," Bull said.

"Not if Germany has her will in this Conclave. Not if the International Army is withdrawn."

"Who's that nutty?"

Piers said, "The Germans killed Secretary Anstruther." He wiped his thin hand over his forehead. "They tricked him into a plane and they shot him in the back."

There was silence. Jack rubbed his nose. "What'd they want to do that for?"

PIERS saw the wink to the others, humor the madman. Because Secretary Anstruther believed that the peace terms should be carried out as written, that Germany should remain under the protectorate for fifty years."

"And if they bump off Anstruther," Jack explained just as if he believed, "then they don't have to, is that it?"

Piers said, "That happens to be it. The man who will take the Secretary's place is friendly to Germany. As is Lord Evanhurst, head of the English Commission."

"Where do you come in?" Bull's chin stuck out. He played the game, but grudgingly.

"I'm the man who saw the hole in Anstruther's back. I was flying after him, carrying his dispatches which he'd left behind." That was good enough. "I found him dead. The Germans know I have those papers. If they can kill me tonight, I can't present them to the Conclave tomorrow."

"There's one thing smells," Bull's mind was working. "Nobody's saying Secretary Anstruther's dead, only that there's something funny about him not turning up. If Secretary Anstruther was dead there'd be headlines all over the papers."

"There will be," Piers said. "After the Conclave. Anstruther's successor didn't want it published until after the Conclave. If it had been the delegates might not have convened. And Germany wouldn't be released from the protectorate at this time."

"Who are you, Mister?" Sammy's mouth was round and greasy.

"I'm Piers Hunt. You've never heard of me."

"I heard of you." Bull thrust forward. "You're the guy Winchell's daring to come out and talk."

Piers continued, "I've worked with Secretary Anstruther for twelve years, ever since peace was declared. In Europe and in Africa." He hesitated. "I haven't dared talk be-

fore tomorrow."

"I'm getting it," Jack nodded. "If you get bumped off you can't throw a monkey wrench tomorrow. Is that it? You're going to go to the Conclave tomorrow and tell all about Secretary Anstruther, that it?"

"That's it," Piers said. "That's why I want to live until tomorrow. To keep Germany from starting another war. If you'll only let me stay until Willie comes, he'll tell you I'm speaking true. He has seen one of the Germans who followed me."

Jack said, "Guess we'd better take in the Conclave tomorrow. Sounds like a good show."

They still didn't believe. Their interest was caught but that was all. Impassionedly he beat against their doubt. "It is important you go tomorrow. Important that you crowd the galleries with men who want peace." Surely they would go; they wouldn't miss finding out for themselves just how crazy this man was who declared Anstruther's death.

Not these three alone, their friends and neighbors, curiosity engendered by newspaper and radio would guide them. If they would be there, even if he did die too soon, peace would have a voice. With man present, man who believed in peace, who was not afraid to demand peace, there would be peace. And he would have won no matter what happened. Watkins must be right; Man could speak.

His eyes closed. He went to sleep sitting upright there in the scarred chair, the others still asking questions. He awoke to Willie's voice. "Looks like trouble caught up. That German scrub?"

It was two-thirty in the morning. Piers said, "His boss."

Bull wasn't hostile now. Willie must have talked while Piers slept.

Willie asked, "Where you want to go, Mister?"

"I'm hiring your cab, Willie." He took out his billfold. "From now until tomorrow afternoon, until you deliver me at the Halls of Peace tomorrow." He counted out two hundred dollars. "Is that enough?"

Willie whistled. "You buying or renting?" He stuck the money in his pocket.

"You know it's dangerous?" Piers said.

"Where do we go?"

He said, "At eight in the morning I must be at the Thirty-third street postoffice. Until then it doesn't matter." He counted fifty dollars three times on the table. One for Bull, one for Sammy, one for Jack. Like buying votes in an election, votes for peace.

"What's that for?" Bull demanded.

"For what I've said. Fill the galleries tomorrow. Bring your friends. I want Nick Pulaski, too—he's for peace. Call him at the International Building. Tell him to bring his friends. Bring everyone who will shout

for peace."

"For fifty smackers I'll fill them galleries single-handed," Sammy grinned. "How do we report to you?"

"You don't."

"Then how you know we'll be there?" Jack shook his head.

"I will know." He would know. And he'd be in the galleries with them.

He turned to Willie. "I don't know where we'll hide until morning. They're on my heels now."

"We could go to my apartment," Willie said. "There's a couch where you could catch a snooze."

Bull wiped his forearm under his nose. He spoke as he folded away the fifty. "Whyncha go upstairs and lie down in my room till morning? If you go home, Willie, you'll never make it back in time. Not the way you sleep. I'll wake you when I go off duty at seven."

"What you say, Mister?" Willie pursed his mouth.

Piers said, "I'd be grateful." Grateful for any place to lay his head, for a little rest.

"It ain't fancy," Bull apologized. "Not very clean. I'm not much hand at house-keeping."

"It is safe?" Piers hesitated.

"Nobody can get up there without getting by me." There were knots in his powerful arms. He led the way up the iron staircase into the loft of parked cars. The sleeping room was half as big as the office. Bull said, "You can lie on the cot. Willie, you fix up the chairs for yourself."

The window was small, looking down to an alley. No one could climb the blank wall. Someone was shadowed in the alley waiting. Piers drew back. He moved to the cot and he sat down.

Bull said, "You'll be safe. I'll wake you at seven."

"Thanks more than I can say."

Bull went out. Piers said, "Push your chair against the door, Willie."

"Scared?"

He nodded. He winced as he lay down.

"You ought to have a doctor look at that arm. Don't pay to let them go. Infection's bad. My brother-in-law—"

"Tomorrow." He closed his eyes. No one could get by Bull. No one could get by Willie in the chair. But his dreams were troubled and he walked on the top of the waters of sleep.

4.

HE HEARD the knocking while Willie snored on. He jerked up. "Who is it?"

"Seven o'clock. You guys in there, it's seven o'clock."

Piers said, "We're up." He said, "Come

on, Willie. We have to move on now." His clothes looked as if they'd been slept in; every bone, not only the wounded one, ached.

Willie yawned. "Jeeze," he said. "I forgot to call the wife." He opened the door to Bull. "I forgot to call Mame. She'll be maddern a wet hen."

"Two hundred smackers'll get her over the mad fast." Bull led them down the stairs to the washroom.

Piers rubbed the stubble on his chin, met his tired eyes in the scrap of mirror. He must find some place today to bathe and shave, to have his clothes pressed. He wondered wearily what tale Hugo had told, if now he himself was wanted for murder other than presumptive. It didn't matter. If he won peace, his truth would be good. If he lost it, nothing mattered.

He combed back his hair, straightened his tie. "If you know a quick place and a safe one, we'll have coffee before we go downtown."

Bull cleared his throat gruffly. "You guys don't need some help, do you?"

"Thanks again," Piers took his hand. "We'll get along." He wouldn't involve anyone else in what might be violence. Willie at the wheel of the cab should be out of the line of danger. "Just be sure not to miss the Conclave today."

"I wouldn't miss it." It was a threat.

The cab was inside the storage garage. Piers got in the back seat; it would be safer for the driver in case—

"We're going to be followed today?" Willie turned on the ignition.

"I hope not." He mustn't be followed this morning.

"Hold on to your hat then."

The cab shot out of the garage. Piers didn't know the neighborhood where they stopped for coffee. He only knew the taste was good. They started off again, carving a curling path through the city. Seventh Avenue was quiet on this early morning, this Sunday spring morning. Piers asked as they neared the Pennsylvania station, "Anyone following?"

"Not as I can see." Willie wasn't so certain now. "You got me so jittery I thought I seen a cab after we left the Coffee Cup. That's why I cut over to the river."

"I want to pick up my mail." Piers spoke hushed as if here in the rolling cab someone might overhear.

"It's Sunday."

"I have a box." His heart had begun to thud. This was the moment, the act that must be kept inviolate. From the rear window he could see no approaching car. He said, "You stay in the cab. Keep the engine running."

"If that fat Heinie turns up?"

He hesitated too long. He couldn't say,

Call the police; he would be no better off in the hands of the law than in the hands of Germany. Not with Gordon directing the law. Perhaps the way to the end would be less cruel but the end of both was defeat, ultimate destruction. He ordered, "If there's trouble, run for it."

"What you think I am—a yellow-belly?"

"Run for it," Piers' voice rang. "And go to the Conclave. Demand peace. Make them give you peace."

He slipped from the cab door and vanished into the postoffice. He moved quickly, selecting the key from its safe hiding place among the many on his key ring, opening the box, taking out the two harmless-looking envelopes. He could hear men walking on the pavement outside, not many, casual steps. He thrust the envelopes into his inner pocket, took a breath before he stepped out to the pavement again and started to the cab.

There was no sound of a shot. The bullet stopped him. Anger rushed into him. To be this close to achievement. His eyes seared. He heard Willie's shout as he tried to force himself forward to the cab. Willie wasn't at the wheel. Willie was running across the street, shouting. There were many voices shouting and he was falling, falling from a great height into an abyss.

He heard the soft speech. "It's my boss, Mister. He's been sick. I got the car right over there."

He opened his eyes. Sight was blurred but not beyond recognition of the dark face bending over him. He tried to cry out but no sound would come. The voice was the voice of David. The irony of it smote him. Now he would be taken to Fabian.

VIII

HE WASN'T dead. In death he wouldn't be lying in a clean bed; he wouldn't be fired by pain; he wouldn't see the inscrutable face of David watching from the chair.

Piers said, "Well, you've won." His voice sounded far away.

The face awoke. "You are conscious. That is good. Don't try to rise. You have lost much blood from the two wounds. The second shot was near the lung. But if you are careful—"

Piers didn't try to move. The effort of speech was trial enough. "You have the papers?"

"Yes. The photostatic copies of Secretary Anstruther's. The letters of Hugo von Eynar."

He said bitterly, "You didn't give up, did you? You kept following, following, all those days and nights."

"I knew you must retrieve the papers be-

fore the Conclave opened. You sent them to yourself, to a post box?"

"You know I did."

"Wise."

Piers remembered suddenly and he started to rise up. Pain wrenched him and he again lay quiet. "What is today?"

"Sunday. The same Sunday. It is noon."

Noon to sundown. And he a prisoner. He asked, "Will you let me see Fabian now?"

The man answered simply, "I am Fabian."

Piers turned his head on the pillow.

"I am David and I am Fabian. Fabian is the man of state. My people need me among them, one of them, and I am also David."

"But Fabian—Fabian is big, a giant of a man. I've seen him in Conclave. You are smaller, older—"

The man smiled. "You know theater, Piers Hunt. A robe—a headdress—the illusion of grandeur."

Piers closed his eyes. "I wanted to talk with you. As a friend. In peace. You came with a gun. Today you used the gun. Why?"

Fabian was unsmiling. "I did not shoot you. It was the German."

"You didn't shoot?"

Fabian said with righteous anger, "I am a man of peace. True, I carried a gun the night I came to you. Because I believed you had killed my friend. My people found him there in the unmarked grave. I took him to a better place, he and the unknown, that no one would know his defeat and shame. I knew you had followed his plane. I believed you were working with the Germans. I could not afford to die. My people cannot go forward as yet without me. With Anstruther gone I must help maintain peace. I have learned since you did not kill him."

"I didn't kill him," Piers said. "But I did send him to his death."

"You cannot blame yourself."

"I let him go on the summons of that telegram—a telegram I distrusted. I should have made inquiries before I let him go."

"Could you stop him? He knew I would not call on him but in need. They who sent the telegram knew that."

"After he flew out I saw the Arab with Anstruther's case. I took it. I thought he'd stolen it. I should have known then he wasn't a sneak thief."

"A sneak thief would have dropped it and fled. He wouldn't have fought to hold onto it, looking wildly for help which did not dare materialize."

"I took off in a borrowed monoplane at once. To follow. I knew the Secretary would need the African reports I had gathered for him. My plane was faster than the one he'd taken. I could overtake him when his stopped to refuel."

He had overtaken it before then, grounded

in the desert. And Anstruther dead, laid on the sand. The grave had already been dug.

"I don't think he knew. The shot was in the back. The pilot wouldn't have had time to dig the grave. The body was still warm. He'd taken the Secretary's watch and ring."

To carry back to Schern, the pelt, to prove that the Secretary was dead. With his bare hands, Piers killed the German, Gundar Abersohn. He had dug the second grave, fired the plane with the substitute case inside. He had stood there and watched the memorial pyre burn for a man of peace destroyed by violence.

HE HAD waited until there were only black shards to show where a plane had lighted. It wasn't until later in the night, alone in his despair, that he realized he alone knew Anstruther was dead. No one could know that until he told.

"I alone held the secret," he said to Fabian. "The Germans planned his death but until Abersohn reported to them that the deed was accomplished, they couldn't know. And Abersohn could never tell. It was then I photographed Anstruther's papers. The Germans would be looking for a bulky package, not a small envelope. I destroyed the originals. I destroyed the briefcase. I sent the envelope to George Thompson, general delivery, New York. I flew to Berne, made arrangements for my work to be taken over.

"When I reached New York I rented a box under the Thompson name, sent instructions to forward my mail from general delivery to the number. Later I sent the von Eynar papers to the same box. I didn't know I was to be followed, but if I were, the hiding place of the papers would not be given away. I didn't once go to it."

"You were followed but no one, not even I, knew soon enough that you were in New York. It was not known until Gordon learned through Berne."

"But, today—no one could have followed today."

"From the garage? I did. I waited all night. And I knew where you must go."

He didn't understand. "How could you know?"

"Your papers must have been in a lock box. The banks are not open on Sunday. It must be a postoffice. There were only two to watch. I had a man at the Lexington Avenue one but I myself chanced the Pennsylvania. It is the main one and it was the more convenient for you."

And the Germans did the same; or they knew with their precise research methods. Knowing, they couldn't take the material; they had to wait for him; the mails were safe. They had waited. He asked, "Who fired the shot?"

"The fat one. The one you knocked down

last night. His orders today must have been to kill; he didn't attempt to take the papers. You are fortunate that he was across the street, a bit too far for perfect marksmanship."

Yes, to kill. Because Morgen was dead. Because there was no longer time for treaties. Piers must be dead before the conference began.

"Your cabman caught him, held him for the police."

He remembered. "How did you get me away from the police?"

"Before they came I took you away. I told the onlookers I was your serving-man. They did not know you were wounded. I made them believe that you were an innocent bystander."

His bloody room at the Astor. He didn't know how to say it. "Am I wanted—have you seen the papers—is there a murder charge—"

"It is being silenced until after the Conclave closes. I have no doubt you will be arrested for the murder of Secretary Anstruther when you are found."

Morgen's death was yet unknown. Silenced by Hugo for his own purposes. "The Conclave." Again he tried to lift up. "I must be there."

"Lie quietly if you please. You are not out of danger."

"That doesn't matter. I must be there. Don't you understand? The overture to war will be played today."

"I understand." His voice was deep as the sound of a gong and as sad. "All are against us. The east in courtesy will not rule contrary to the will of the west. I have pleaded with them. I have told them: It is my land that first will be stricken. The black man will again be put on all fours. They promise they will come to my assistance if we are attacked. That will mean global war anew."

"They will not counter the will of Secretary Anstruther. What is decided by America will be their decision."

And they will believe that Gordon speaks with the voice of Anstruther. That had been arranged.

"I have even gone to Lord Evanhurst. He scoffs at the idea of attack. He too promises help in case. Even if the promise is kept, it means war."

"Yes. And Gordon?"

FABIAN said, "I did not go to Gordon."

"He could not help you." Piers understood. Gordon believed the unholy German three too well.

Fabian was speaking. "I could not beg from the murderer of my friend.

Piers looked into his eyes. "Gordon?"

"Only three men knew that the Secretary would come to you in North Africa. You

who sent for him, himself, and his home secretary, Gordon."

"Gordon could have given the information away."

"It was Gordon who ordered the telegram sent to Anstruther; it was Gordon who paid for the plane, who hired the German from a list supplied by Schern."

He tried to understand. Not the German hands guiding Gordon; Gordon behind the Germans. And yet behind Gordon the Germans again. Without their wish, he could not have been motivated. It was as a curve in time; all were together. He cried from the depths, "Why?"

"Ambition is a greedy god."

"But why didn't you tell me this—that night you came to my room?"

"I did not know. Only after you told me of the telegram did I send my men to seek the truth. By the time they discovered these things, it was too late. Your President had named Gordon to succeed the Secretary."

"And you did nothing," Piers accused.

Fabian said, "What chance had I? Fabian of Equatorial Africa, suspect and accused of border troubles, to discredit the President of the United States of America? I have lived a long time, Piers Hunt, long enough to know that the will and the wish are not enough, behind them must be the power."

"You are afraid," Piers spoke from despair. "You as all the others are afraid to speak. Maybe you have lived too long under the apes. You have lost faith in man." He cried out, "Maybe I haven't lived long enough to be afraid—or maybe my little span has been so long that I have gone beyond caring for fear. I only know that I'm not afraid to speak for peace, to fight for peace. Too late? It can't be too late."

It hurt to breathe.

"You ask what I can do? I'll tell you. I am going before the Conclave today. Don't shake your head. Call in your doctors. They can give me something to put me on my feet long enough for that."

"I didn't shake my head for that, Piers Hunt. I've seen wounded men accomplish the superhuman before. I was a doctor in the Last War. I shook my head because there will be hundreds of police detectives and government officers waiting for you. You will be arrested before you can enter the hall."

Piers twisted a smile. "That's your part, Fabian. You will get me into the hall. You know the theatre? The ceremonial robes—the headdress. My face won't be seen. No one will look for my face there."

Light lifted Fabian's eyes, the light of hope. "Once inside I will go to the galleries, among the men. The men who aren't afraid, who will fight with me for peace."

Fabian said, "No. There can be a better way. The robes, the headdress, yes. But I

am to speak this afternoon. It is the sop to Cerberus, flung by Lord Evanhurst. I speak in memory of my absent friend, Secretary Anstruther. I will offer in my stead a man of my peace commission. I will give you to them. They will not dare demean the dignity of the Conclave by moving against you while you are speaking. The law will wait. You will say what you wish without fear."

It wasn't words; now he wasn't afraid. It was for this he had endured, to speak with the voice of Anstruther. Fabian said with sadness, "I do not know how much a heart can endure. I do not answer for your tomorrow."

"I am not going to die." No fear, no trepidation. "If I should, it wouldn't matter. Peace alone matters now." Not man, nor woman; not life, nor death.

Fabian handed him a glass. "Drink this and rest. I will come for you in time."

Piers gulped the draught.

Fabian went to the door. "I have been afraid," he said. "My faith was small. I thought that Anstruther's death meant the torch had been extinguished. I did not know a hand would grasp it as it fell."

2.

THE International Halls of Peace rose tall and white on the Palisades. As the great windows flamed with the setting sun, the delegates gathered in the circular chamber. They could never come together here without remembering Anstruther. The poet in him had planned the majesty of the gathering, the hour of sunset; the blue flag of peace, marked with the white winged dove, the sturdy olive tree, blowing triumphantly. The room was filled with sound and majesty.

The blue robes of America, the royal purple of Britain, the red of Russia, the gold of China, all the spectrum represented in all the nations of the world. The great four were in their predominant places. Gordon, handsome in his dress despite the tension lines about his mouth. The Germans had entered. Brecklein's face was heavy, Schern's head darted like an adder. Hugo's bruises were cosmetized but no one had painted a smile on his face.

Piers had passed unnoticed into the hall at Fabian's side. The scarlet robe he wore, the envoy's hood, made his face of no importance as he planned. His tan was deeper color than some of Fabian's other men.

The open galleries were massed with the faces of men. Without the grounds were massed with those for whom there was no room within, waiting to hear without seeing, waiting to know the fate of the world, of peace. There was no fright on their faces; there was curiosity and beneath it decision. Piers turned his eyes upward seeking faces with names, Willie, Bull, Jack, Sammy, Nick

Pulaski, even Cassidy. They were there.

He had no weakness at the moment. When there was no consciousness of body there could be no pain. He waited tensed and sure, as sure as Gordon had been a few sundowns ago. The bells of the Conclave rang out. The invocation was spoken, the words echoed in the hall, "Peace be with thee, And with thy spirit."

Lord Evanhurst stood awaiting silence. Thin and old, yes, but empurpled, his delicate face showing no trace of the clever brain behind it. His dignity carried to the furthest corner of the hall. "It is with the greatest regret that I bring you word that our Secretary will not be able to attend the present conclave."

He waited but the reaction was minute. The press didn't stir; the story was in type, awaiting only deadline release. Only to the least important nations could this be information, and even they must have been fed by the grapevine. "The President of the United States has named the first secretary to Secretary Anstruther, De Witt Gordon, to act in his place. Secretary Gordon will assume the chair."

Gordon came forward. The applause was not of their knowledge of him, it was for his stature. He spoke. Words, brave words, stirring words, no apologies, no hint of the anxieties wracking him. Time enough for that tomorrow when the business was begun. Nothing must mar today, not even the knowledge that Piers Hunt was in freedom.

He finished speaking in tumult and shouting. The relief on his face was pitiful. He had been accepted. He raised his arms. "At the suggestion of the dean of our members, Lord Evanhurst, I have asked a man whom Secretary Anstruther calls friend to speak to you of our beloved and absent leader. Secretary Fabian of Equatorial Africa."

The delegations were without interest. The opening of the Conclave, pretty speeches, pageantry, no more. Nothing of import at the ceremonial overture. But the galleries were agape. They had come for the show. They knew what the delegations had forgotten. Every moment for peace could be important.

The emphasis of eyes shifted from the stalls of the mighty to the faraway position of the new African nation. Fabian rose, majestic, commanding. Even the delegates were forced into attention as he stood there waiting for the murmur of applause to subside. Mouths bent to ears, the rustle of sound. This is Fabian, the mystic.

Fabian lifted his hands. "Peace be among us." It was a prayer, not a catch phrase of the Conclave, a prayer more powerful than the perfunctory obsequy which had opened the meeting. It was torn from the black man's hope. He waited until its overtones faded into the high dome.

"I have been asked to speak to you of Secretary Anstruther, our Secretary, my beloved friend. I cannot speak to you of my friend. When the heart is heavy with grief the mouth is filled only with silence."

There was the first faint wind of doubt blown across the heads of the mighty. Gordon's hand lifted and fell, but Evanhurst did not move. Only his lips were finer drawn than before. Among the Germans there was the shifting of eyes. The hall was silent.

"I can speak of our Secretary but there is no reason for me to speak of him. You knew him. You knew he was a gentle man, a good man, a just man." The clangor of iron rang in his words. "Secretary Anstruther is dead."

NO SOUND rose from the delegates in their marble stalls. The first rumble of distant thunder came from the galleries alone.

The guilty ones dared not stir.

"Because he was just, his death demands that justice be fulfilled. Because he was just, his assassins must be brought before justice. Secretary Anstruther was murdered."

The thunder grew. The Germans looked for escape but there was no escape here. Man was watching from above, man waited without. Gordon's eyes were holes in the clay of his face. On Evanhurst's mouth there moved a smile but his thin fingers were wound tight about the arms of his chair.

"I cannot tell you how he was murdered. I do not know. I found his body with the one who was the instrument of death. I carried both to the Lake of the Crocodiles that the killer might be destroyed even unto his ash, that my friend might rest where his goodness is enshrined, where his peace will be preserved."

They were losing fear, the guilty ones. Brecklein's fingertips came together. Sly hope crept over them. Hugo put up his eyeglass.

"My friend is gone. And when I knew that he was gone, I was afraid. I knew he was not killed because he was gentle, although his gentleness betrayed him to his enemies. He was not killed because he was good, although his goodness was a threat to them. He was not killed because he was just, for being a just man he was not quick to accuse. He was killed because he was a man of peace. And I was afraid. I thought with him peace too had died, as his assassins meant peace should die. In my fear I believed these things. Until today.

"Today a man proved to me that I was wrong. Peace is not dead because peace must not die. This man can speak not of Secretary Anstruther but for him. Better than I he can speak to you for my friend. Because he was the better friend. Because he believed when I knew only doubt and fear."

His hand gestured Piers to his feet. "I give you Piers Hunt."

Piers spoke while the moment held. His voice throbbed into the hall. "I speak for Secretary Anstruther."

He didn't wait for them to gather their forces to strike him down, for despite Fabian's belief to the contrary, they would strike even here in the sanctum of peace if given opportunity.

"Secretary Anstruther labored for peace. Secretary Anstruther believed in peace. Secretary Anstruther wanted only peace. Because he was a man of peace, he is dead."

He didn't know how much truth he dared put into the massive hands that knotted above. Truth was the powerful weapon. Throughout the history of the world it had been withheld from man as too dangerous for his manipulations. Piers would not fear man, he could not. Man alone could save the world. The truth must not be confined to the chosen; it must be given all. He must speak now or Anstruther and that for which he stood went down into darkness forever.

He knew and man must know. They must look back and see one man alone in the jungle of the past daring to aspire to the dignity of man, neither to ape the apes nor to be satisfied with the brutish natural state of man. How many men must have been done away with both by the apes and his fellow brutes before the achievement? But the achievement came to be. The apes still swung by their tails but tails were no longer the shape of nobility. The luxurious ape, the aristocratic ape, the darling ape, the delicate ape was legend and dust.

Man must be made to remember what aspiring man forgot when the achievement was forgotten as an achievement, when it was granted; remember that the brutish spirit remained dormant in too many of his brothers. They no longer clubbed their thrust-jawed, jut-browed way through the jungle. They had taken on the outward accouterments of dignified man but within the brute instinct roiled.

Man must remember anew what man dignified as man forgot, that there would always be those others who could not forget the graces and luxuries of the delicate ape, who would, after having forgotten the pattern, ape the ape. It was the brutes who waged the wars; it was the apes who instigated them, swinging from their safe high-leaved trees.

As these atavists could not be bred out of the race, neither could men of aspiration, men who watched neither the earth nor the trees, whose eyes lifted to the stars.

Thus he spoke and there was silence while he thus spoke. His words went on out of his hard anger and determination. He saw the rage and frustration beginning to cover the faces of the Germans, the fearful defeat

on Gordon's shoulders, the ironic acceptance of reversal in Lord Evanhurst's smile.

AND his anger grew and he spewed out the entire truth. "I accuse the guilty ones and I say to you in Fabian's hands is the proof of their guilt. There is proof in a telegram which forged the name of Fabian. There is proof in a man hired to pilot a death plane. There is proof in the murdered body of Anstruther—a bullet hole in his back. They will say they did not kill. That is true. Their hands are not soiled with blood. Their hands only forged the tool that would slay."

His voice rang harshly, "I accuse them by nation—Germany. I accuse them by name—Brecklein, Schern, von Eynar."

The three did not believe this. They shrank in their chairs as he cried out, "Stand! Stand and deny!—what you cannot deny."

His voice quieted to scorn. "And I accuse the Judas who sold his friend not for thirty pieces of silver but for the robe he wears—De Witt Gordon."

The fear and shame on Gordon's face was terrible to see. Piers turned his eyes away from it. "I accuse all those who have threatened peace by dealing with these men."

The anger was gone. "Secretary Anstruther died for peace. Because he had decreed that no nation and no individual within any nation should threaten peace."

Behind Evanhurst he saw Watkins' strong shoulders, shoulders waiting for burden, willing to accept it. He saw Mancianargo, and the way his whipped eyes lighted in hope as the interpreter whispered to the Italian peasant. He saw incredulous tears on the cheeks of the French Dessaye. He saw faith replacing fear under the flag of Czechoslovakia, of Poland, of Finland, of Greece, of all nations who had suffered and died and risen again from hell.

"Secretary Anstruther was murdered by men and nations who despise the equality of peace. I give you that proof now, not to the few in secret session, but now to all men of peace. You shall decide the rewards of the guilty."

There was no doubt where Asia would take stand. Justice stood awful on the brows of her nations. As Fabian went, now would go the conference.

"Anstruther is dead but his words are not dead." He held the sheaf of papers high in his hand for all to look upon. If he was shot down now, the papers were safe. "I bring you his last work, the words he entrusted to me."

They were open accusation. They were Piers' findings of the border incidents, and they were the simple familiar tale of treachery against a man who was a man of peace, who could not be swerved from right and decency and the good. He would not hurry these words, each syllable must be heard by

all present. He was weakening now, the drugs with which Fabian had bolstered him were wearing thin. He didn't falter. The men without power, the men with voice and will alone, the Nicks and Willies and Bulls, must hear; there must be no chance for the schemers to scheme again, to threaten, to harry and bribe, to offer counter-proposal. He read until the last paper alone was in his hand, and he leaned against the podium.

"This was written in the plane, the plane piloted by that German officer, purchased by that American friend, the plane in which he was given death, a shot in the back. I read you the last words of Anstruther."

He read: "Without peace, our world ends. There can be no peace unless we are strong enough, courageous enough, to deny our weakness. It would be weakness for us to turn back from what we know is right."

No one could doubt that these were the words of Anstruther. No one among the nations but had heard him so speak. No one would ever know that Piers Hunt had on that despairing night, on his return from the desert, forged this last paper.

He read the final line: "Germany must continue to be protected in accordance with our agreed plan for peace."

He clenched the podium. His eyes lifted to the faces of the men, his voice cried, "Anstruther died for peace. Do you want peace?"

He waited, heard the first whisper, the echo, "Peace."

He cried again, "Do you want peace?"

The echo repeated more strongly, "Peace. Peace."

His sight was blurring but his fingers dug into the stand and he remained upright. "Do you want Peace? Do you want Peace?"

He heard the swelling from above, from below, from without, "Peace . . . Peace . . . Peace . . ."

Fabian's hand caught his arm, supported him. He saw from far away Evanhurst and Gordon opening empty mouths, their words silent under the chant for peace. He saw the graven images of Germany. He alone heard the mocking voice of dissent, "Melodrama, Piers?" He alone answered, "Any weapon for peace, Morgen. Even death."

The Conclave would dare not turn against the cry of man, rising to frenzy now, to grandeur. This time he had won. But he knew the fight must be fought over and again, each year, each day, each minute. The beast would snarl anew, the delicate ape would scheme. Man must fight on until peace was as fixed on the earth as the stars were fixed in the cosmos.

The room was fading but the magnificat of the chant swelled to a roar, "Peace . . ." He saw Fabian's face, strong, smiling. As Piers crumpled, he smiled too.

Next Issue's Mystery Novel: THE EVIL STAR, by JOHN SPAIN

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Instinctively his hand went to his eyes

DEATH IS NO AMATEUR!

By JAMES DONNELLY

Playing Cops and Robbers Gets a Novelty Salesman a Free Ticket to Disaster but a Little Quick Thinking Changes His Destination!

IT STARTED when Harold Sherman read a mystery story about how the hero overheard a conversation in an adjoining room by holding the open end of a water glass against the common wall and pressing his ear against the bottom of the glass.

Sherman, who was on his semi-annual West Coast sales trip, had just finished reading the story. There was

the dull sound of voices in the next room and Sherman decided to try the experiment.

It was immediately successful.

"Please, George!" he heard a woman's voice say. "Can't you try to forget?"

"How can you forget murder?" a man said.

"It will only lead to—"

"That doesn't make any difference!

That doesn't change the memory of his eyes, of the blood!"

"You're not helping things!" the woman said. "There's still Arden and—"

"Yes. There's still Arden."

"What will you do?"

"I'll have to watch. It's going to take time."

"Craddock?" the woman demanded.

"Does he suspect?"

"I don't know, Mary!"

There was a short silence and then the woman said:

"I'm only trying to help you."

"Of course," the man said in a resigned voice. "Sorry I spoke that way. Here—"

Movement sounded.

"That's better!" the woman said. "I don't mind repairing lipstick after something like that!"

The man's laugh sounded forced. "Let's eat. We have time."

There was more movement and a door closed. Harold Sherman took the glass from the wall and heard the two persons walk down the hallway.

His eyes wide, his small, thin body tense with excitement, Sherman hurried to his door and opened it a trifle. He saw the backs of the two persons as they walked away from him.

They looked young and well-dressed. The man wore a sharkskin worsted suit that draped easily from broad shoulders.

The grace of the girl's body was accentuated by a street suit of some material Sherman could not identify. She had smooth blond hair.

THOUGHTFULLY Sherman closed the door and sat on the edge of his bed. He lit a cigarette in meditation.

In his forty years of life, nothing quite as exciting as this had happened to him. Marrying Clara had been exciting and a little frightening. When the two children had been born, he had been excited. The day he had been made Western sales manager for the

New World Novelty Company he had suffered emotional disturbances. But up until now, exciting adventure had been confined strictly to printed pages and the movie screen.

Now he had overheard a conversation that had entailed murder, and quite obviously peril for some person or persons now living!

Suddenly a look of determination came into Harold Sherman's eyes. He nodded as if he had made a decision. He always had wanted something out of the ordinary to happen to him. This was it! He would be careful, of course, and he would not be drawn into anything, but it should not hurt anyone if he were secretly inquisitive.

Quickly he slipped into his sack coat and put on his hat. He looked into a mirror. With the hat at a smart angle, his closely cropped mustache and thin lips, he decided that he did not look unlike detectives he had read about.

"I'll be careful," he promised himself again as he left the room. "But it won't hurt to see what happens!"

His first deduction was correct. The man and woman were in the hotel coffee shop.

Sherman chose a booth near them and ordered a sandwich and coffee. Surreptitiously he glanced at the couple.

He could see now that the girl was pretty. She had small, regular features and nice eyes. When she smiled at the strong-featured man across from her, she did things with her lips that reminded Sherman of movie glamour girls.

The couple talked in low voices. Sherman thought that there was a tense expectancy about them, an attitude of awareness and nervousness.

They ate small steaks and finished with coffee. The man lit cigarettes for them and glanced at his wrist-watch. The girl frowned worriedly. She said something and the young

man nodded. They finished their coffee and got up.

Sherman waited until they were in the hotel lobby before he followed them. He bought cigarettes and watched as they moved toward the elevators. The girl went up and the man walked toward a street exit.

Sherman glanced at a clock as he followed the man out. It was a little after nine o'clock and, due to war time, it was still light. Harold Sherman wondered what the evening would bring.

Remembering the technique of detectives he had followed through printed pages, he lingered half a block behind the young man as they walked quickly toward the theatrical section of the city.

He was a bit too far behind because he almost missed seeing the young man go into a cocktail lounge which displayed a sign reading:

ARDEN'S

Arden was one of the names the couple had mentioned!

Harold hurried after the man.

Arden's resembled a great many cocktail lounges on the West Coast. There was a long bar, a section of booths divided by waist-high partitions, much chrome and leather, and the whole effect was softened by subdued lighting.

HOWEVER, there seemed to be an exception to the standard cocktail lounge. A large entrance opened into a room at one side where Sherman could see tables and a small dance floor. On a raised platform in front of a modernistic shell, musicians were setting up their equipment. A man in a dinner coat appeared and removed a velvet-covered rope from across the entrance. A small, metal sign hanging from the rope had read:

CLOSED

"Night club," Harold thought. "Clara wouldn't like my being here,

but I'm going to see this through—at least, partly!"

The man called George was at the bar, moodily staring into a drink. Sherman was confronted by a small problem. The bartender looked at him questionably and, because Sherman doubted if they had milk or soft drinks, and feeling that either might make him conspicuous, he ordered whisky and soda.

He never had tasted it, but understood that it was a good, solid drink. He didn't like the taste, but he downed half of the glassful.

A tall, dark man with thin lips and shrewd eyes came to the bar. He was dressed in evening clothes and he walked with an air of proprietorship. The bartender nodded deferentially to him and several patrons smiled. The man in evening kit went straight to the man Harold Sherman watched.

"Hello, Fowler," he said.

So that was the man's name! George Fowler.

Fowler smiled briefly. "Hello, Arden."

"Mary here yet?"

George Fowler shook his head. "Later," he said.

The tall dark man was Arden! What was it the girl had said? "There's still Arden and—"

Sherman mentally painted a background for the man. Night-club-owner, smooth, wise, probably hard and dangerous. Sherman finished his drink without coughing. He reflected that Arden probably was one of the toughest men in the city.

Arden nodded at the bartender who busied himself behind the bar and set a glass of milk before his employer. Sherman stared and when the bartender took his own empty glass he automatically murmured:

"Another."

Arden and George Fowler faced a thick, heavy-set man with bristling black eyebrows and massive jowls who came toward them from the street entrance. This man grunted.

"How're things, Craddock?" Arden said.

Craddock grunted again and glanced at Fowler.

"I can use you tonight," he said. "We'll have a mob up there."

Fowler twirled his glass without expression.

"I'll be up after a while," he said.

Craddock moved away and went through a door at the back of the place.

Harold Sherman gulped his drink and motioned for the bartender to fill the glass again. So far there were no effects from what he had consumed. He decided that he probably was a natural born good drinker. And he was thirsty. The ham he had eaten for dinner had been salty.

At least he had identified everyone now! Craddock was the large, bristling-browed man. Arden was the smooth, sleek night-club owner.

THE bartender put a drink before him and Sherman stared into its amber color. Abruptly he wondered who had been murdered!

How had George Fowler said it? "How can you forget murder?" And, "That doesn't change the memory of his eyes, of the blood!"

Sherman drained his glass.

He wouldn't get mixed up in this, but he would watch. A faint glow began to spread over him, and he felt a strange surge of confidence.

Music came from the side room. It was good music and Sherman hummed with it under his breath. He should come to places like this more often. He smiled broadly and the bartender interpreted it as a request for another drink. Sherman didn't mind.

George Fowler left the bar and went through the doorway Craddock had used. Sherman debated whether to follow, and decided against it. He had no idea what was beyond the doorway and he could think of no sound reason for his presence if he should run into trouble.

Fowler probably would make another appearance at the bar. In the meantime, the music in the other room sounded good and people were arriving from early shows. The noise of a crowd and dancing blended beneath the music.

Obviously evening dress was not necessary, for several men had gone into the night club in business suits. He might as well enjoy the night club until Fowler returned.

The man who had removed the velvet-covered rope eyed him a trifle disapprovingly, but showed him to a table.

Harold glanced at a menu placed before him. The price side made him uncomfortable, but he had saved on expenses during the trip. He could afford a splurge and he suddenly was hungry in spite of the pleasant glow he felt—or because of it.

He ordered a steak and another drink.

Fowler had not returned to the bar by the time Harold Sherman had finished the steak. He ordered another drink to take up time and gazed about the room and through the entrance where he could see most of the bar.

The master of ceremonies called for attention through a loudspeaker.

"And now we give you—Mary Dewitt!"

The band went into a fanfare that blended into a hit tune and a girl began to sing.

Sherman stared at her. She was the "Mary" he had heard in the hotel room, the girl who had been with George Fowler. She wore an evening gown and was lovelier than Sherman remembered her to be.

Even as his mouth opened a little in amazement, he dimly heard a shot somewhere in the building. Someone shouted at the bar and there was a rush of persons toward the back end. The music hesitated and picked up again. Mary Dewitt's voice faltered and she lost her smile.

Sherman felt a tightening of stom-

ach muscles, a quick flash of apprehension. A moment later he was in the crowd at the end of the bar near the back doorway. They stared down at Arden.

For a second, Sherman thought the night-club owner was dead, but then he saw that Arden's eyes were open and he was smiling reassuringly at patrons while a bartender tied an improvised bandage around his head.

"Nothing serious," Arden said. "Everyone have a drink on me!"

A WOMAN gasped nervously and several men cleared their throats. Several patrons departed hastily while others broke into an excited babble.

"Tried to kill him . . . Man shot at him . . . They don't know who it was . . . After Jim Horace was killed . . . Not a safe place to be . . ."

The bartender helped Arden to his feet.

"Please," Arden said, "it was an accident. There's nothing to alarm you. If you will step to the bar, the house is setting up drinks!"

Sherman felt hot, a little dizzy, and excited, yet his mind seemed unusually clear.

Someone had mentioned a Jim Horace who had been killed. Now someone had shot at Arden!

Sherman followed the others to the bar and somehow he consumed several more drinks in the next half hour. All that had happened began to build into a definite pattern for him. He had a duty. This was something that he should handle with calmness and assurance.

He nodded firmly and took a deep breath.

"Where can I find Mr. Arden?" he asked the bartender.

"I'm sorry. Mr. Arden is busy now. Perhaps later—"

Harold Sherman tightened his lips and narrowed his eyes.

"It's important," he said. "Matter of life and death!"

The bartender gazed at him with a half smile.

"Look, Mister, don't let the excitement get you down. Everything's under control. Have another drink on the house!"

It was obvious that the bartender didn't take Sherman too seriously. He would have to use some method of entree.

"I'm not fooling," he said crisply. "I'm Harold Sherman—" He hesitated and from the glow came an inspiration. "Sherman, the private detective. I must see Arden."

He tried to sound like the head of a West Coast detective agency to whom he had tried to sell some trick equipment. It must have been effective because the barkeep's grin slowly faded.

"Okay," he said. He pointed to the mysterious doorway at the back of the room. "Up the stairs."

Sherman nodded wisely and walked through the doorway and upstairs. At the top landing a small, dark man met him.

"Yes?"

"I want to see Arden."

The man shook his head.

Sherman repeated the speech he had given below. The small man was thoughtful, and finally opened a door.

The monotonous voices of housemen at crap tables, the whirl of roulette wheels, the click of chips, came through the noise of people and the heavy odor of cigarette smoke and perfume.

The small man led Sherman through the crowd to another door.

"Wait here," he said.

Sherman waited while the man went into the room and closed the door. After a few moments he returned.

"Go in," he said.

Arden sat at a broad, clean-surfaced desk. The temporary bandage had been replaced by a neater bit of workmanship. He smoked a cigar and looked at Sherman through a cloud of rich, blue smoke.

"Sherman?" he said. "You're a detective?"

SHERMAN gulped and made a split second decision. Never before had he felt quite like this, so confident and reckless.

"That's right," he said. "I have valuable information for you."

Arden looked at him shrewdly.

"You've had a few drinks, haven't you?" he asked quietly.

"No more than usual," Sherman lied.

"Have it your way. What's the information?"

"First I want to know if someone tried to kill you," Sherman said.

"Maybe." Arden's face was without expression.

"Then I have the answer."

Arden's eyebrows went up and he leaned forward.

"You have? What is it? We might make a deal."

Harold Sherman took a deep breath and explained what he had heard through the hotel wall. He repeated the conversation as nearly as he could and pointed out the references to Arden and Craddock and a murder that haunted George Fowler's memory.

"So," he concluded, "I believe that Fowler may have killed Jim Horace—who I understand was killed—and tried to get you a while ago."

Arden stared at him thoughtfully. After a moment he leaned back in his chair.

"Who was Jim Horace?" Sherman asked.

"My partner," Arden said. "What else do you know?"

"That's all. You can take it to the police now."

Arden smiled. "Do you have any identification?"

"Identification? I have my—"

Sherman stopped. He had identification testifying that he was a salesman for his company, but Arden was talking about private detectives.

"I'm afraid I lied," he admitted

sheepishly. "I'm not a detective, but it seemed the only way I could get to see you."

Arden calmly smoked his cigar.

"Go on," he said.

Sherman explained about the experiment and his decision to investigate.

"Interesting," Arden said. "Have a drink on the house, Sherman. I'm deeply indebted to you."

Arden excused himself and left the office for several moments. He returned with the drink. Sherman smiled and drank it. He would have quite a story to tell Clara! Probably he had a lifetime friend in Arden! He could brag discreetly about his "friend, Arden, the night-club-man."

Funny. He was getting sleepy. Very sleepy.

"Listen, Arden, maybe I should go to the police and—and—"

Arden was dissolving in a mist.

"Say! Something's wrong with me!"

The room was becoming dark. Arden was a dim shadow and numbness crept rapidly through Harold Sherman's consciousness. He leaned forward slowly and tried to straighten up. His body made a solid thumping noise when it hit the floor. . . .

AT FIRST the sound of voices was a confused noise. Gradually Sherman could make out words. There were two men's voices.

Sherman moved. Something bound him, pressing into his arms and legs. The movement brought a stab of pain behind his eyes. Gradually he realized that he was on a floor, that his arms and legs were bound by rope.

He felt sick and wished he could breathe cold, fresh air. His mouth had a brackish taste. His eyeballs were sore.

He looked about. Evidently he was in a closet and the voices came from the other side of a door.

Suddenly he was aware of breathing quite close to him. A thin slit of light came beneath the door. It was

enough for him to make out the figure of another person near him in the spacious closet.

Mary Dewitt! She was bound and gagged. Her eyes were wide as she stared at him. She blinked, and when she saw that Sherman was about to speak, she shook her head violently and looked toward the door.

He remained quiet and listened. He recognized Arden's voice.

"—identification card says he's Harold Sherman, a salesman for the New World Novelty Company. I fixed his drink."

"No one saw you bring Mary in?" the second voice asked. It sounded like Craddock's.

"One of the boys picked her up as she was leaving. He brought her in the back way."

There was a short silence and then Craddock said:

"This is the devil of a mess. What are you going to do?"

"What am I going to do? You're in this as deep as I am!"

"Okay, okay. What are we going to do? If that chump, or Mary, talks to the cops, we're washed up."

"That's right, Craddock."

"Why did you let Gunner McKay come back here? That was a fool thing to do!"

"How did I know that Fowler saw him bump Horace? That he suspected McKay was working for us? That he laid low until McKay returned and then tried to take him at the bottom of the stairs?"

"What was his idea?"

Arden snorted. "Don't be dumb, Craddock. He'd have taken Gunner to the cops. If Gunner talked, he'd implicate both of us. Don't forget that Horace was Fowler's best friend. Fowler guessed that we had him bumped. He saw Gunner do it, but didn't know Gunner. He played a waiting game here. He knew Gunner would come back. Fowler not only wanted Gunner, but he wanted us, too!"

"How much do Mary and the chump know?"

"Enough to talk to the cops. At least, Mary does. And we can't take a chance with Sherman. The cops aren't dumb. They'd hear his story and start to check. They'd find out plenty."

There was another silence. Then Craddock spoke again.

"Say—what about Mary and Fowler? What was the set-up?"

"She admitted they're married. Pulled a Gretna Green last month."

"What happened downstairs tonight?"

"Fowler caught Gunner at the bottom of the stairs. He pulled a gun on him at the stair landing. I came along at the right moment. There was a fight. Fowler's gunsight cut my head. There was a shot. We threw him into that closet off the landing."

"Croaked?"

"No. Grazed skull. He's tied up and gagged down there."

"What do we do?" Craddock snapped again.

"Still dumb, Craddock?"

"You mean—"

"What else? You want to turn them loose to go to the cops? We're all going to take a ride. You and Gunner and I. We'll have three guests going out, but none coming back."

"That chump—how about him? Someone might check and—"

"No one knows he's here. He was playing cops and robbers. It's his tough luck. That company is going to wonder what happened to their salesman, Mr. Harold Sherman."

"All right. Let's go."

INSIDE the closet, all of the self-confidence and courage that Harold had known a short time before drained away, and left a vast emptiness of fright and alarm.

He didn't have to be a detective to know what they meant. Even a salesman would know. They meant to kill him! Mary Dewitt, George Fowler

and Harold Sherman were going for a ride. A death ride!

He thought of Clara and the children. If only he had stayed in his hotel room, if he had not tried the experiment, if he had not taken those drinks and wanted to play detective!

Frantically he strained against the ropes. He didn't want to cry out. He didn't want them to know that he was conscious. That might hurry them.

He stopped struggling and looked at the girl. Her eyes were calm and she shook her head. He thought there was almost a look of pity in her eyes.

Harold took a deep breath. He had to calm himself, to show that he could be as calm as she was.

He had been a fool. If he had minded his own business, Arden would not have known about the girl. The girl's life would not be in danger now. Nor his own. Fowler? Maybe the girl would have been free now to help him! And he had been wrong. Fowler had witnessed a murder, not committed one!

He smiled bitterly. A man of forty should be adult enough to keep out of trouble. Maybe Clara was right when she said, "Harold, sometimes you act like a small boy!" Most women said that at one time or another to a man, and perhaps there was truth in it.

He remembered Clara's kindly smile, her middle-aged plumpness that was beginning to show a little, the way she was with the children, how she had encouraged him, listened to his troubles, stood by him.

Tears dimmed his eyes. He blinked them away.

He would fight! He would find a way out of this!

"How?" a quiet, inward voice mocked him.

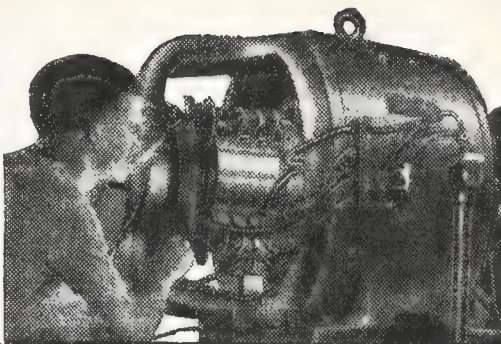
The door opened and Arden looked down at him.

"Come on, chump," Arden said. "Your car is waiting!"

In back of Arden, Craddock grunted. . . .

It was a large sedan. The transfer from the closet had been easily accom-

[Turn page]



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plished by means of a back stairs and an alley door.

Now Harold Sherman and the girl sat in the back seat. A hulking man, whom Arden called "Gunner," sat between them. On the bottom of the car George Fowler was crammed against their feet. In the front, Craddock drove and Arden sat beside him.

They had left the city and traffic was thinning to an occasional car.

Harold wished he would awaken to discover that this was all a bad dream, that he was safe at home beside Clara. He moved restlessly and Gunner's large body leaned against him.

"Take that turn to the right," Arden said in the front seat.

Craddock nodded, and the car slowed to leave the main highway. Car lights sprayed over a country road that wound into heavy brush and trees.

Two hundred yards from the highway, the car stopped.

The girl and Harold were shoved from the car and ropes and gags removed. George Fowler tried to fight and was struck over the head with a gun in Gunner's hand.

CRADDOCK turned off the car motor and Sherman was aware of a dull roar close by in the woods.

Arden smiled grimly. "That's a falls," he explained. "A two-hundred-foot drop to rocks. That makes it simple. We simply knock you cold and drop you in the river. You go over the falls and eventually your bodies will be washed up somewhere down the river. No bullets for the cops to trace, no bruises or crushed skulls that couldn't have come from the fall. Maybe the three of you were boating — who knows?"

Craddock laughed quietly. "A neat, easy way," he remarked.

Sherman tried to steady his knees.

"All right," he said huskily. "I guess I know why this is happening. But I . . . Will you do something for me?"

"Nuts," Gunner growled. "Let's get going."

Arden looked amused. "Wait." He

motioned to Gunner. "Let's see what the little man wants."

"It isn't much," Sherman explained in a tense voice. "It's simply that I have a wife and a couple of kids. My insurance premium is past due—the policy expires if I don't get a check in the mail tomorrow. That means they wouldn't have a cent after—after I'm gone."

"You're not suggesting that we pay your life insurance premium?" Arden smiled thinly.

"No. Simply let me write out a check. I have the company's self addressed envelope in my pocket and a stamp. Just let me write the check and put it in the envelope and if you'll mail it when you get back, my wife and kids—well . . ."

Arden laughed. "I should worry about your wife and kids!"

"Give the chump a break," Craddock interrupted.

Arden glanced at Craddock and shrugged.

"Okay," he said. "Go over to the car lights and write your check. Gunner will mail it for you—and Gunner will watch you write the check with

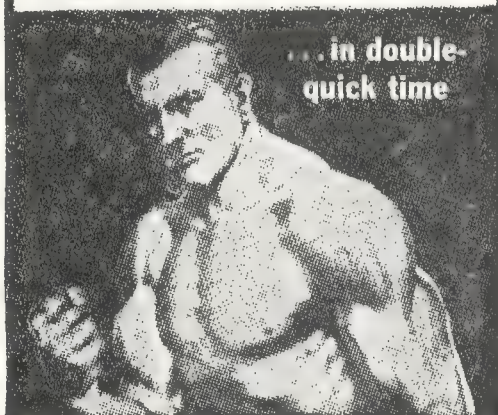
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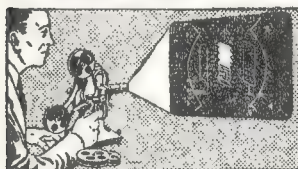
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an automatic in his hand. Get it?"

"Thanks—thanks, Arden," Harold Sherman said in relief.

Arden nodded to Gunner who led Sherman to the car and carefully watched the captive take out a check-book and the insurance envelope.

Sherman took a fountain pen from a vest pocket and removed the cap. Gunner watched him in evident amusement. Suddenly Sherman raised his head and stared into the night as if he had heard a noise.

Gunner's eyes jerked in the same direction.

That was the second Harold Sherman wanted. He lifted the fountain pen and manipulated it.

Gunner yelped and instinctively his hands went to his eyes.

Sherman dived for the gun, seized it, and wrenched with all his strength. He had it!

He backed away from the floundering Gunner and faced Arden and Craddock from the darkness behind the lights.

"Lift your hands!" he ordered. His voice cracked, but the words were plain. "High!"

Arden's hands were slow going up. Sherman pointed the gun down and pulled the trigger. The gun jerked in his hand. It was the first time he ever had fired a gun. But the results were what he wanted. Arden's hands sprang up.

"Mary, help George to the car," Sherman said.

GUNNER cursed with rage and blindly rushed at Sherman.

Sherman took a deep breath, lifted the gun and brought it down smartly. It thudded against Gunner's temple and the man went down. Sherman whirled toward Arden and Craddock. They came out of crouches and raised their hands again.

"Can you get George to the car?" Sherman asked the girl.

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"Yes," she said shortly.

"Drive the car back to the first telephone you can find and call the police," Sherman instructed her. "I'll keep guard here."

A few moments later Mary had turned the car. She hesitated for a moment before she started back, and handed him a flashlight she had found in the glove compartment.

"What did you do?" she asked Sherman in a puzzled voice. "What happened to Gunner?"

"I'm a salesman for the New World Novelty Company," Sherman smiled. "A new novelty we're pushing this year is a tear-gas gun in the form of a fountain pen. I carry a demonstrator in a vest pocket. I used it on Gunner!"

"I'll be hanged!" Mary Dewitt said honestly. "Mister, you ought to be a detective!"

Harold Sherman shuddered.

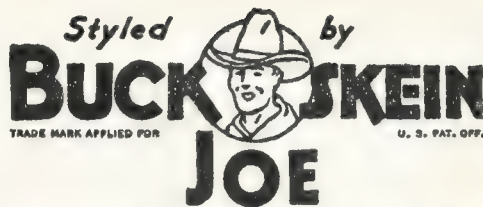
He would be glad when the cops came to take over. In the meantime—

"You hurry, young lady," he said earnestly. "Because I'm almost finished playing cops and robbers!"

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THE MAN WHO KNEW

By SAM MERWIN, JR.

A Siren Call Can Always Lure Detective Ken Whelan, but It Becomes a Resounding Tocsin When Murder Is in the Air!

SHE opened the door for him herself. Even the darkness of the hallway could not dim the whiteness of her throat, the silvery red of her hair, the cold perfection of her face. Whelan felt the old familiar surge of excitement that still assailed him every time he saw her. Somehow he fought it down.

"I heard you sent for a cop," he said quietly.

"Ken!" she said, and the husky depth of her voice danced icily on his spine. "It's—you!"

"Yes, Mrs. Leeds," he told her. "What's wrong?"

"It's Harlan—my husband. He's in the living room, dead."

She led the way to the end of the hall, to the big sunken living room with one whole wall of plate glass that revealed the panorama of the park far beneath and the twin-towered skyscraper apartment houses on its western rim.

Harlan Leeds was dead, all right. He lay on his back in the center of the pale blue carpet with a bullet through his heart. A little pool of blood that was not yet dark had run down the left surface of the half globe that was his stomach to gather under his outflung arm. The gun, a thirty-two caliber automatic, was clutched in his right hand.

"How did it happen, Mrs. Leeds?" he asked her.

She was standing in the doorway behind him, her slimy round arms folded. The green velvet hostess gown she wore failed to hide a single alluring line of the greyhound magnificence of her figure.

"Don't call me Mrs. Leeds, Ken," she said. "It sounds—"

"Formal, maybe," he said with a faint, ironic twist of his mouth. "Homicide is on the way, but suppose you tell me what happened, Mrs. Leeds."

Her hazel eyes seemed to turn red, but under the force of some greater urgency, she regained her self-control so quickly that the flash of rage was gone almost before it showed. She took a deep breath, and for a moment her full lower lip disappeared beneath an even row of shining white teeth. Whelan waited.

"Harlan has lost an awful lot of money lately," she said softly, her voice almost a whisper. "He went South two weeks ago

to try to save some of his holdings. He got home only an hour ago. He was very terribly depressed. I tried to console him, when he got a telephone call. I was in my room, waiting for him to finish. Then I heard the shot. I ran in, and as soon as



DONNA LEEDS

I saw him, I called the police."

"That show he put you in last month must have cost him a wad," said Whelan.

"The critics murdered it," she said. "They really murdered him." Her voice was flat, toneless, as she kept her eyes off the corpse.

"Yeah," he said. "I know."

He got down on his hands and knees beside the body, studying it closely. Where the blood hadn't spread over the white shirt front, he could see the powder burns. As he rose, he looked down at his hands. One of them was smeared with blood from the pool on the carpet.

"Did he have insurance?" he asked. It was none of his business, but he wanted to know.

"Fifty thousand," said the woman. "There was a no-suicide clause. I won't get any of it. It was about all he had left."

"Tough you can't make it look like an accident," Whelan told her. "Then you'd have fifty gees to show for it."

"Ken, don't be so bitter," she told him.

HE LOOKED at her, leaning gracefully against the door jamb—every move a picture. He couldn't take it, so began arranging the butts in the ash-tray on the smoking stand beside him. He put the barely smoked cigar off by itself, arranged the lip-stick-tinted cigarette butts, the plain ones and the straw-tipped ones in neat little piles.

"Do you blame me?" he said, not looking up.

Despite the anger that made his veins throb, his mind was working. This was the woman who, three years ago, almost cost him his badge. She hadn't been an actress then—unless it was the kind of "actress" who lists her profession thus on police blotters.

She had been chief come-on girl for a big shakedown mob, a mob he, as a detective lieutenant, had been assigned to smash. Like a puling infant, he had fallen for her. Even now, he didn't blame himself too much, she was that lovely. He hadn't turned her in, and the case had gone smash. So had Detective Lieutenant Kenneth Whelan—busted to a cop. As soon as the heat was off, she had dropped him flatter than a pancake in a Child's window.

"No, Ken," she said. "I don't blame you. But don't be too hard on me. I always wanted to do big things, be a star. I never kidded about that."

"I guess you didn't," he said.

"Tell me, Ken"—her face was alight with curiosity—"why were you assigned to this particular beat? You must have known I was living here."

"I asked for it," he told her.

He could look at her now, watch the quick little glow that came to her, that would always come to her—even with a dead husband lying fifteen feet away—when she felt she was being praised.

"I wondered," she said, almost softly. "I didn't know."

"No, you didn't know," he told her. There was plenty she didn't know, but that could wait. He lifted his hand, the one with blood on it. "I'd better wash this off. Where's the bathroom?"

She told him, and he walked down the hall alone, opened the first door he came to. It was a man's bedroom, with pictures all over the walls—pictures of college teams and actors and actresses, lots of them. The late Harlan Leeds had been a producer, a successful one until he tried to make a star out of his wife. That, Whelan supposed, had been part of the deal when she married him.

Moving quickly and silently as a big cat, Whelan opened the wardrobe that stood against the far wall. A lot of suits hung on hangers in half of it, more suits than he had ever seen outside of a clothing store. They were all conservative in cut, dark in color. On a hook at one side, however, hung a pair of violent peacock-green lounging

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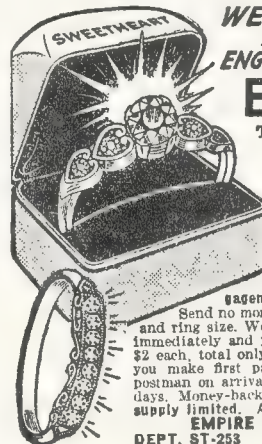
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"What some guys wear in private!" he thought.

Quickly he went through the drawers that made up the other half of the wardrobe, searched through the mounds of white shirts and other white linen that lay there neatly piled.

He went on into the bathroom to wash the blood from his hand. Watching it flow down the drain in a pinkish stream, he had to fight against reminding himself that this was literally the heart's blood of her husband. He dried his hands on a soft towel, squared his cap in front of the mirror, then went on out through the bathroom's other door.

He found himself in a bedroom, her bedroom. There was a big four-poster bed against one wall. The furniture was delicate, as were the French prints that hung sparsely but primly on the pale green walls.

She was standing in the hall door, waiting for him. Curse it, did she always stand in doorways? She must have picked that trick up since her days and nights with Kenneth Whelan, detective-lieutenant. That it was effective didn't make him like it any better.

"How did you know I would come out this way?" he asked her, annoyed.

She laughed, low and silvery. It went with her, he thought, low like what she was inside, silvery like the highlights in her amazing light-red hair. It took him a moment to remember what he wanted to ask her.

"Don't you have servants here?" he said finally. She nodded.

"They have the day off," she said, and made a face. "You've got to roll out carpets under them these days if you want them to stay."

"I wouldn't know," he told her.

They were staring at each other in a sort of deadlock when the doorbell pealed its three soft chimes. She went to answer it, and Homicide came in, headed by dour-faced gray-haired Captain Regan himself, the man who had busted Whelan, busted him back to a beat pounder. He barely permitted himself a nod in Whelan's general direction as he breezed by. Once a man was marked off in his books, he stayed that way.

It didn't take long. Regan prided himself on moving fast and missing nothing. He listened to Donna Leeds' story with curt sympathy, examined the corpse, waited until the photographer was through.

"Okay, boys," he said then to his staff. "I guess that wraps it up. It's the M.E.'s job from here on in."

"Excuse me, Captain," said Whelan, stepping forward from the wall, where he had been watching the boys do their stuff.

Regan scowled at him. "What is it, Whelan?" he said impatiently. Regan was al-

[Turn to page 92]

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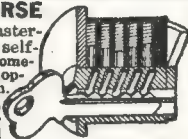
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ways impatient—unless he was questioning a witness. Then he was slow and gentle and dangerous as a basking cobra.

"There's something you ought to know," said Whelan.

"Well?" the detective captain asked.

"Leeds didn't shoot himself. You'd better have Mrs. Leeds take a paraffin test. I think you'll find powder marks on her hand."

"He's crazy!" said the woman.

SOMETHING in her tone caused Regan to wheel and look at her sharply. Then he swung back to the patrolman.

"What makes you think she did it?" he asked, not quite so brusque, but eager.

"I was here right after the call came through," said Whelan. "I've been looking around a little on my own."

"Okay." Regan didn't like that, but he had to take it. "Let's have it."

"In the first place," said Whelan, marshaling his facts methodically, "take a look at the ash-tray on the smoking stand. You'll find a barely touched cigar there—an expensive cigar. How often does a man light up a good cigar and then shoot himself?"

He glanced quickly at Donna Leeds out of the corner of an eye, saw her standing there, hating him, but knowing she had to listen. She would have to know how much he had found out before she could build her defenses. Captain Regan snorted.

"Tripe!" he snapped. "Leeds got a phone call that caused him to kill himself. He may have put the cigar down to answer it. You'll have to do a lot better than that, man."

"Very well, sir," said Whelan. "Take a look at those cigarettes. There are two kinds there, one plain-tipped, one cork-tipped. Both kinds are smeared with lipstick. Does that suggest anything to you?"

"Just that Leeds and Mrs. Leeds—excuse me, ma'am—may have indulged in an affectionate greeting. After all, he'd been away."

"It won't wash, Captain," said Whelan. "Leeds was a cigar smoker exclusively. I walk this beat, and I know. Mrs. Leeds only smokes the cork-tipped kind."

"You seem to know a lot about these people, Whelan. How come?"

"Let's just say I was interested," said Whelan. "Now if you'll follow me." He led the way to the bedroom, revealed the pajamas. "These things didn't belong to Harland Leeds. Look at the rest of his stuff here—shirts, pajamas, underwear. He was a black-and-white guy."

"This officer is out of his mind, Captain," said Donna Leeds, who had followed them, was again standing in the doorway. "Do I have to endure such persecution in my own home?"

"It won't take long, Captain," said Whelan.

[Turn to page 94]

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The Homicide officer nodded for him to go ahead. "There is one other thing. Mrs. Leeds says she was expecting her husband home. Yet the servants have been given the afternoon off. I ask you, does that make sense?"

Regan shoved his fedora back on his head and squinted thoughtfully at nothing. Then he flung an order over his shoulder.

"Have Mrs. Leeds wait in another room," he said.

"No!" she said frantically. "You can't—"

"Lady," said Regan, "if this cop is wrong, he's going to lose his badge. You don't have a thing to worry about—unless you did it."

When they were alone, he confronted the patrolman, scowling.

"I don't like it," he said. "I always used to think you were a good detective, Whelan, before you went bad. This thing smells, all right, but how are you going to make a case out of it? Answer me that!"

"I'll try," said Whelan quietly. He wished he dared smoke a cigarette, but Regan was death on a cop in uniform smoking. "Here's the way I read it. Mrs. Leeds wasn't expecting her husband home tonight—not until tomorrow, or maybe later. So she got rid of the servants and had another man up here.

"Those cigarettes are pretty good proof they were up to no good. It's my guess Leeds came in and—well, caught them in something. There was some kind of a blow-off, and he was killed. Then the guy scrambled and Mrs. Leeds cleaned up after him, putting his pajamas in her husband's wardrobe. Then she called the police and gave them the suicide yarn."

"Why Mrs. Leeds? Why not the guy? And how can we get a case unless we find him? It might be anybody."

"It isn't," said Whelan. "And I'm not practising magic either. Off the record, Mrs. Leeds is the little tramp who got me busted three years ago. I know a couple of things about her."

"You want to make it hurt, huh?" said Regan.

"Not unless she's got it coming to her," Whelan replied. "But, baby, has she! Skipping that, she always was stage crazy—wanted to be a star. That's why she let Leeds marry her. He was a producer, and she figured he'd put her name in lights."

"One of those," said Regan. He was looking thoughtful.

"One of those," affirmed Whelan. "He got her name up in lights, all right, but they came down in a hurry and most of his dough with them. To put it quickly, she and the show both smelled to high heaven. I should know. I caught it."

"I remember, you asked for this beat when you were busted," said Regan. He wasn't

unfriendly any more. "I figured it was some graft you'd dug up."

"I never grafted in my life," said Whelan. "I simply made a fool of myself over a girl. But here's the patter. It's no stall about Leeds being on the rocks. So little Donna, having milked him dry, figured it was about time to move onto more productive fields. She had flopped on Broadway. What would be your guess about her next try?"

REGAN looked thoughtful, narrowing his eyes.

"Hmm—Hollywood, I suppose, You mean those pajamas—"

"Exactly," said Whelan. "But upper-case Hollywood. Flop or no, she's been a star here through nuzzling up to a producer, so I can make one good guess about how she would go after a Hollywood career. So let's figure who's in town that is big enough to draw her interest. There's only one just now—Jack Stanby, the big shot at Colossal."

"I know all this, because I've been interested in Donna Leeds, one way or another, for a long time now. I read all the theatrical columns. Stanby is staying at the Carlton Towers. It's my guess those pajamas are

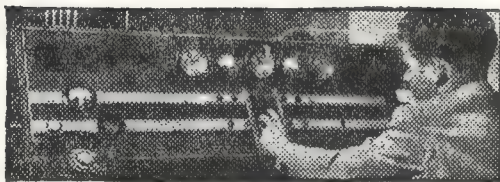
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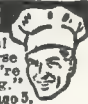
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his. Better send a man over to check."

"I'll send a platoon," said Regan, lunging for the bedroom phone. When he had finished, he looked at Whelan again. "Do you think he did it?"

"No," said Whelan. "Why should he? A guy like him can comb pretty women out of his hair if he wants to. My guess is that Leeds caught them and raised the roof—refused to divorce her unless Stanby shelled out. Or maybe he just refused to divorce her at all. Either way, he was in her path."

A few minutes later, a call came through from the Carlton Towers. Whelan was on the beam, and Donna Leeds was in the soup. When it was over, Regan turned to the patrolman.

"What made you suspect it was haywire in the first place?" he said.

"That insurance, for one thing. Donna would kill for fifty grand any day, but she wouldn't kill to lose fifty grand. So she had to have more money in sight somewhere."

"Anything else?" Regan asked as Whelan hesitated.

"Yeah," said the patrolman. "It sounds silly, but what really got my nose working was when she folded her arms and bit her lower lip before she started to talk. That's her trick—she always does it when she goes into a scene. I knew right then she was acting—probably the only decent performance she ever gave in her life."

Regan came over and shook hands with Whelan.

"You know, Ken," he said warmly, "when a man's cause is justified, there is nothing I like better than to see a good hater. You've got to be a good hater to be an honest cop. And, Ken, you're an honest cop."

"Thanks, Captain," said Whelan.

"It's all yours, Lieutenant," said Regan.

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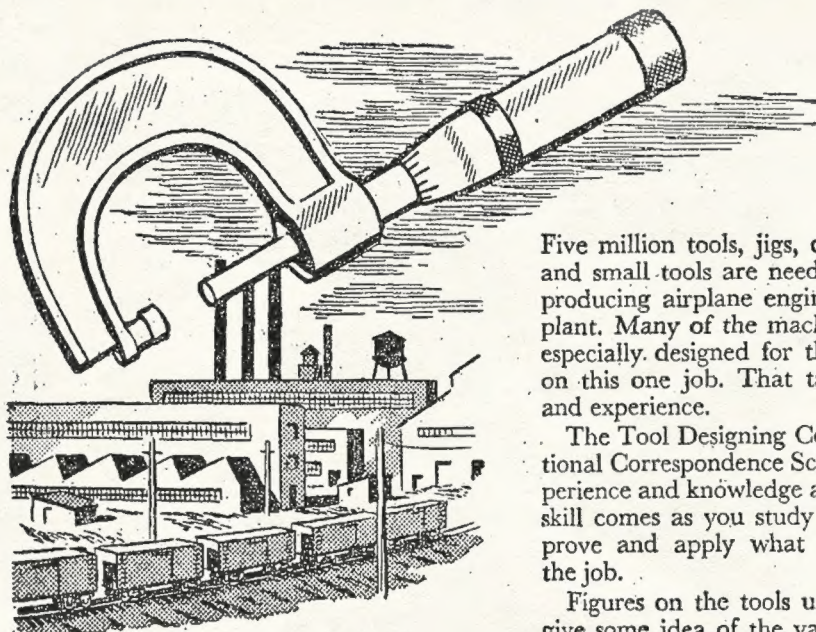


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| <input type="checkbox"/> Plumbing | <input type="checkbox"/> Power House Electrician | <input type="checkbox"/> Tool Designing | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Fitting | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical Electrician | <input type="checkbox"/> Welding, Gas and Electric | |
| Chemistry Schools | <input type="checkbox"/> Practical Telegraphy | Radio School | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Telegraph Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Electronics | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio, General |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry, Analytical | Internal Combustion Engines School | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Operating | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry, Industrial | <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Technician | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio Servicing | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Chemistry, Mfg. Iron & Steel | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engines | Railroad School | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plastics | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel-Electric | <input type="checkbox"/> Air Brake | <input type="checkbox"/> Car Inspector |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pulp and Paper Making | <input type="checkbox"/> Diesel Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Locomotive Fireman |
| Civil Engineering, Architectural and Mining Schools | <input type="checkbox"/> Gas Engines | <input type="checkbox"/> Railroad Section Foreman | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architectural Drafting | Mechanical Schools | Steam Engineering Schools | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Aeronautical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Boiler Making | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge and Building Foreman | <input type="checkbox"/> Airplane Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Combustion Engineering | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bridge Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Flight Engineer | <input type="checkbox"/> Engine Running | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Building Estimating | <input type="checkbox"/> Foundry Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Marine Engines | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Civil Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Heat Treatment of Metals | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Electric | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Coal Mining | <input type="checkbox"/> Industrial Design | <input type="checkbox"/> Steam Engines | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Contracting and Building | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Drafting | Textile School | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Highway Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Mechanical Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Cotton Manufacturing | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Lumber Dealer | <input type="checkbox"/> Mold-Loft Work | <input type="checkbox"/> Rayon Weaving | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sanitary Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Patternmaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Textile Designing | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structural Drafting | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading Shop Blueprints | <input type="checkbox"/> Woolen Manufacturing | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Surveying and Mapping | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Drafting | | |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheet Metal Worker | | |

Name..... Age..... Home Address.....

City..... State..... Present Position..... Working Hours..... A.M. to..... P.M.

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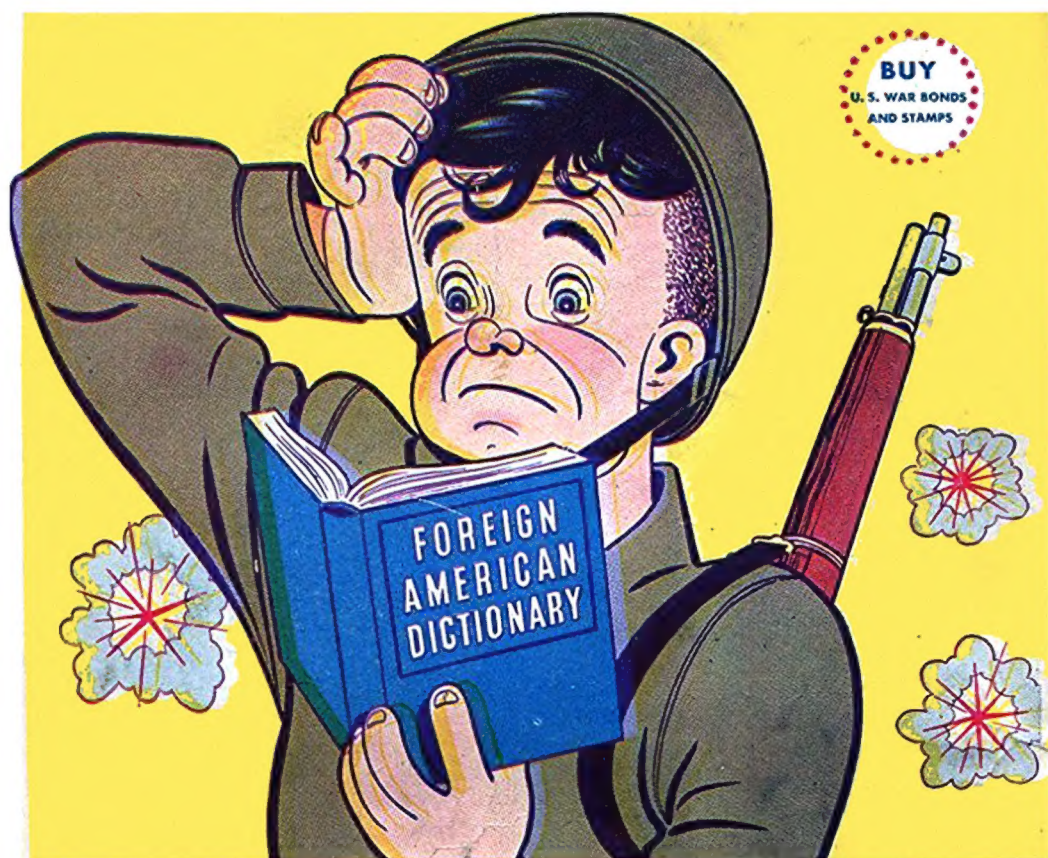
MEN'S JACKET Sale Price \$4.95 Camel Tan Luggage Brown Forest Green

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